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NEIGHBOR JACK WOOD.

BY

J. T. TROWBRIDGE.

"A CERTAIN *WOMAN* WENT DOWN FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO,
AND FELL AMONG THIEVES."

BOSTON:

J. E. TILTON AND COMPANY.

1865.

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NEIGHBOR JACKWOOD.

I.

THE MOUTH OF WILD RIVER.

IN the kitchen door of an old, weather-worn farm-house stood Mr. Abimelech Jackwood, filling his pipe for an after-dinner smoke, and looking up at the sky with an air of contemplative wisdom.

"Is it go'n' to rain, think?" asked Abimelech the younger, — commonly called Bim, — holding out his hand to see if he could catch a sprinkle. "Say, father — Confound your pictur'!"

The anathema was addressed, not to the parent Jackwood, by any means but to the dog Rover, who, seeing the boy's hand extended in a manner which appeared provocative of sport, leaped up from the door-stone, where he had been lying, with his chin on his paws, snapping at the flies, and pounced upon the shoulder of the younger Abimelech.

Mr. Jackwood preserved a circumspect silence, while his sagacious eye seemed to explore every square yard of sky visible between the two ranges of the Green Mountains that bounded the valley.

"I never knowed the sign to fail," he observed, after mature deliberation, crowding the tobacco into his pipe-bowl with his thumb, "that when you see a light mist, like the smoke of a chimney, movin' acrost the face of the Eagle Rocks, 'arly in

mornin', — like what there was this mornin', — there 'll be rain within four-'n-twenty hours. Them 'ere clouds is jest what I expected; but mebbey they 'll hold off all the arternoon. I don't see no crows on the dead ellow yit."

"I wish you 'd go a-fishin'," said Abimelech. "It's Sat'day, and we shan't do much work if we stay to hum."

"I ben thinkin' a little about tryin' a hand at the fish, myself," responded Mr. Jackwood, lighting his pipe at the kitchen stove. "But I guess, Bim'lech," — puff, puff, — "we 'll finish hoein' that little patch o' 'taters fust," — puff, puff, puff, — "then see how the weather looks. How're ye on 't for hooks an' lines?"

Abimelech made haste to find the fishing-tackle, and submit it to his father's inspection.

"How spry you be, Bim!" cried his sister Phœbe, — a bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked girl of sixteen, — over the dinner-dishes. "If you 'd been asked to bring a pail of water, 't would have taken you twice as long to start."

"Tell her you don't go a-fishin' every day," said Mr. Jackwood, good-naturedly. "Where's your sinkers, boy?"

Bim entered into a long and complicate history of the manner in which, by various mischances, the sinkers had become lost or destroyed.

"I can tell a straighter story than that," laughed Phœbe, flitting the table-cloth at the chickens. "He took the sinkers, and all the other lead he could find, to run a cannon to shoot Independence with. The top of the pewter tea-pot went the same way."

Bim looked troubled under his father's reproof.

"I don't care, for all that, though," he whispered, winking at his sister, "if he 'll only le' me go a-fishin'!"

"I don't know what we shall do for sinkers," — and Mr. Jackwood fumbled in the nail-box. "There an't a bit o' lead in the house, 't I know on."

"There is that 'ere Ticonderoga bullet," suggested Abimelech, meekly.

"Yes; and it's lucky you did n't git holt o' that, when you

run your pesky cannon! But I kinder hate to use that. It's a relic I've ben lottin' on handin' down to futur' generations."

Notwithstanding the patriotic desire, Mr. Jackwood, retiring to the bed-room, opened the till of his chest, and produced the famous bullet.

"I expect that 'ere ball killed a man, Bim'leeh," he remarked, impressively, balancing the relic on the palm of his hand. "Your Uncle Dani'l picked it out of a skull, to Ticonderoga. The heft on 't can't be much short of a ounce; an' what a story it could tell, childern, if it could only talk!"

Mrs. Jackwood earnestly counselled her husband against sacrificing so precious a memento of Revolutionary times. But, having duly weighed it in his hand, and found it lighter than the present necessity, he submitted it to the hammer, pounded it out flat on the door-stone, and proceeded to the manufacture of sinkers.

Abimelech's industry that afternoon excited the surprise and admiration of all who witnessed it. He hoed potatoes—to use his father's expression—"like a major." The anticipation of piscatory sport inspired him; the stint was speedily accomplished; and just as the noisy old kitchen clock was striking three, father and son might have been seen passing through the door-yard gate, with their fish-poles on their shoulders.

Huntersford Creek, a broad, clear-running stream, swept through the valley within a stone's throw of Mr. Jackwood's house; and far to the north the fringing willows on its banks, and graceful elm-trees stationed here and there, marked its winding course. One mile below, Wild River, dashing down from the mountains like a savage bridegroom, hastened to the embrace of the more gentle stream. But the coy creek eluded the approach of her impetuous wooer, in a hundred coquettish curves,—now advancing softly to meet him, or moving on serenely by his side, soothing and taming him with song; then, when almost within his reach, turning suddenly aside, and leading him a long and tortuous chase through the green meadows; until, driven to the verge of the interval, beneath the brow of a mountain that stood like a solemn priest, blessing the union, the fair fugitive yielded, and they twain became one stream.

Mr. Jackwood professed an acquaintance with the geography of this region, which he proposed to explore. Abimelech, elated with the idea, trotted along by his father's side, carrying his fish-pole jauntily, and chattering incessantly.

"Here is a lesson for ye, Bim'lech," said his father, as they reached the vicinity of the river, pointing to an old-fashioned dilapidated house, in a wild-looking yard by the road-side. "This used to be the fust best farm on the interval; an' the man 't lives here bid fair to be the richest man in the county. Fifteen year' ago, where you see all them beds o' gravel an' rocks, there was about the han'somest field of corn 't I ever set eyes on. Wal, it got along to'ards the last of August, and the corn promised to turn out nobly; everybody was praisin' on 't, an' Mr. Hoodlett made his brags on 't, tellin' about the great crop he was goin' to have, till it seemed to me su'thin' must happen to that corn. So, one day, when I was passin' by, I spoke to Hoodlett. Says I, 'Hoodlett,' says I, 'what if your corn should turn out poor, arter all?' says I. 'T an't possible,' says he; 'I know I shall have the biggest crop ever raised on the crick, jes 's well 's if I 'd seen it harvested.' 'Don't be too sure,' says I. 'Man ap'int's, and God disap'int's.' 'I tell ye what,' says he, 'neighbor Jackwood,' says he, 'I would n't ask God Almighty to insure me seventy-five bushels to the acre, any way,' says he; 'I shall have it, an' there 's no gittin' away from 't.' Wal, it was rainin' a little that day; but it rained harder that night; an' all the next day, an' the next night, it come down like forty-'leven Dutch pedlers; an' the next mornin', when Hoodlett looked out o' the winder, there wan't a stalk o' corn, nor a square foot o' corn-field, to cure sore eyes with."

"What had 'come on 't?"

"'T wan't insured, an' 't was gone. Wild River 's a terrible fraction stream, time of freshets, but it never done noth'n' like that 'fore nor sence. It come down through the Narrers with a roar 't could be heerd miles away. It overflowed the hull country 'bout here, an' brought down a grist o' trees an' rocks from the mountains, with more gravel 'n a man could cart away in a life-time. The corn-field took the wust on 't, an' got sarved

so bad, 't a stranger would n't a b'lieved, the day arter, that there was ever so much as a road through the tanglements of trees, roots, an' tops, that lay half buried and piled on to each other, all up an' down the river. That was the ruination of Hoodlett. The best part of his land was sp'ilt; an' it looked so much like a judgment from Heav'm, 't he got discouraged, an' has ben runnin' down hill ever sence."

The adventurers had by this time reached the bank of the river, which foamed and flashed, and plunged and bubbled, and shot in swift, green currents amid the great round bowlders that lay scattered up and down its bed, while the music of its plashing filled the air.

Here they turned aside from the road, passing through a waste and barren field; climbed a high bank lifted upon a perpendicular wall of rock from the bed of the stream, and entered a thick grove of young trees. Mr. Jackwood went forward with the poles, following a path that led along the brink of the precipice. Abimelech kept behind, sometimes stopping to pick from the young spruces bits of gum, which stuck provokingly in his teeth; or chewing leaves of the bitter hemlock; or peeling thin ribbons of the silver birch.

"Is hemlock p'ison?" asked the boy, spitting out some leaves.

"P'ison?—no. What makes you ask that?"

"'Cause I jest happened to think my history-book says Socrates drinked hemlock to kill himself."

"O, wal," replied Mr. Jackwood, "I've no doubt 't would kill a man, if he should take enough on 't; so would a good many other things."

"Socrates must a' took a perty good swig," suggested Bim.

"Or perhaps 't was the ground hemlock; that's p'ison. But keep still now; you 'll scare all the fish."

They reached a ledge which overhung a deep, narrow basin of rock. Beneath them lay the water, clear and calm. Stones, and pebbles, and fishes, could be seen in its transparent depths. Here they threw in their hooks, with tempting baits; they tried alternately worms and flies; from the shallow falls, where the singing water came rushing down from above, to the stony shelves at the

mouth of the basin, where the crystal sheet burst once more into bubbles and sparkles of foam, they left no spot unvisited by their lines. But neither perch, nor pickerel, nor trout, could be allured.

"What fools they be!" cried the indignant Bim. "I put my hook right up to their mouths, and they don't know enough to swallow it. I don't believe but that we can ketch some of these big fellers with a snare."

It seemed possible. Accordingly, a few minutes later, in place of hooks, wide round loops of copper wire went down into the still basin. But now the fish grew suddenly very shy. Through the snares and around them they darted, in a most tantalizing manner; sometimes remaining quiet and watchful until the wire approached within too dangerous proximity of their noses, then shooting away in schools. Not one could be taken; and after another half-hour's unsuccessful sport, Mr. Jackwood's patience failing him, he reluctantly wound up his lines.

"I tell ye what, Bim'lech, there's no use wastin' time in this 'ere wretched hole. We'll be sure o' ketchin' suthin' at the mouth of the river."

Below the bridge, they undertook to follow the bed of the stream. For some distance they experienced no difficulty; they enjoyed excellent advantages for fishing, as they proceeded, with the exception of the simple fact that no fish would bite; but at length the narrow channel to which the stream had shrunk during the dry weather began to widen and shift its course, and it became necessary either to leave the river-bed altogether, or cross over to the white fields of dry stones that now made their appearance on the other side. First they tried the banks; but the tall grass and the strong willows were found serious obstacles in the way of comfortable fishing. Then they attempted to cross the stream on the stones, selecting a shallow place for the execution of the enterprise. But the round bowlders, covered with the scum of dried slime, proved treacherous footholds, rolling and turning on the slippery stones beneath them, and perilling the balance even of the careful and sagacious Mr. Jackwood. Abimelech followed his adventurous parent; when suddenly the latter

heard a great splashing behind him; and looked around. The boy was floundering in the water, and endeavoring, in a great panic, to regain a footing on the stones.

"Careless!" exclaimed Mr. Jackwood. "There, there, stan' still! The water won't drown ye; 't an't up to your knees. Now, what need was there o' gittin' in all over?"

He was still speaking, when the boulder on which he imagined himself firmly planted began to revolve. To preserve his balance, he stepped carefully forward; but the boy had spattered all that side of the rock, and, Mr. Jackwood's foot resting on a spot as slippery as glass, he slid, with a great splash, into the water, bringing down the rattling fish-poles, in rather dangerous style, on the crown of Abimelech's head.

"O, O, O!" screamed the boy, pitching about once more in the water.

"Ketch holt o' my hand!" cried the elder Jackwood. "This all comes o' your wantin' to go a-fishin'!"

Bim cried desolately; and, having reached the dry stones, stood with distended hands and feet, dripping like a newly-washed sheep.

"D' I hurt your head?" asked his father, touched with remorse.

"Ye-e-s! You mos' broke it!" snuffled Bim. "O, you h-u-r-t!" — as Mr. Jackwood, with paternal solicitude, examined his crown. "It's bad enough, I should think, to kill a feller, thout scoldin' him for 't afterwards."

"Don't talk so!" said his father, sternly. "Ye an't hurt much, I guess, arter all the fuss."

"Yes I be, 'too!" whined Abimelech, holding his head in his hands. "You'd think so, if you'd ben knocked over with a couple o' thunderin' great poles."

"There, don't swear! I guess now we'll go hum; we've had about sport enough for one day."

The injured Bim became suddenly pacified.

"I don't want ter go hum," — giving his crown a final rub, and putting on his straw hat. "I can get dry in a little while. My head feels better now."

Mr. Jackwood sat down and emptied the water out of his boots. His hopeful heir followed his example; and afterwards divested himself of his trousers, in order to wring them out and hang them on the bushes to dry. Then, in a light and picturesque costume, he went hopping about on the stones, with his fishing apparatus, and caught a fine brace of trout during the ensuing half-hour.

"I declare," said his father, "if you don't beat the Dutch! I han't had a nibble yit."

"O, my!" cried the excited boy, leaping recklessly upon an unstable stone, "there is a smashin' big feller!"

Mr. Jackwood thought it must be indeed a "smashin' big feller," from the great commotion of waters. He looked up, and saw an object flouncing in the river like a young whale. It was Abimelech, however, not the fish.

"So you thought you 'd jump in arter him, did you? You're a smart boy!"

Abimelech's second ducking had been more thorough and extensive than the first; so that, by the time his trousers were dry enough to put on, his shirt was in a capital condition to go upon the bushes in their place. But the charm was now broken; no more luck had he; so he hastened to tie his freshly-washed garment to his fish-pole, and, waving it in the air like a banner, followed his father down the river.

In consequence of recent freshets, the river had changed its bed a dozen times; the valley appeared ploughed up with ravines, which branched out in every direction. The dry fields of stones had disappeared; the stream became sluggish and dark, creeping over the black ooze of the interval; and the grass on the banks now grew so thick, and rank, and high, that the boy became disheartened.

"I can't go no fu'ther!" he complained. "There's brakes, an' nettles, an' everything to bother a feller. I'm afraid o' snakes."

"Keep up good pluck!" cried his father. "Here's the crick, close by."

What was taken for the creek proved to be an old bed, with a black and shining pool of dead water fast asleep in it, between

crumbling banks. To go around it was a labor replete with pain and difficulty. It led over flats full of dangerous sloughs; then other such pools appeared, in the midst of which our adventurers became confused. Sometimes they mistook the river for the creek; more than once they mistook the creek for the river; and finally there appeared to be numberless rivers and creeks winding in every direction.

"There!" cried Mr. Jackwood, at length, "there's the creek, this time, 't any rate. We'll find it nuff easier goin' on t' other side to pay for crossin' over; then we can go up to Dunbery's old bridge, an' so hum. It's go'n' to rain; an' I don't see any gre't chance for fishin' here, arter all."

"But we can't cross here!" whined the disappointed Abimelech; "the water's a mile deep."

It was a broad channel, filled with clear, still water, in the depths of which could be seen great shining logs, lying tangled and crossed on the black mud of the interval.

"What a boy you be to stretch a story!" exclaimed Mr. Jackwood. "Here is a good place to ford."

He rolled up his trousers above his knees, and carried Abimelech over on his back; when, reaching the opposite bank, he sat down to pull on his boots, which the boy had brought over in his hands.

"Where's my stockin's?" — thrusting his hand down one of the legs.

"I d'n' know; I han't seen 'em," replied the boy.

"You don't know! Why don't you know? I told you to take care on 'em."

"I guess you laid 'em down on t' other side."

"An' I got to go back arter 'em! I wish you'd larn to keep your wits about ye!"

Mr. Jackwood arose, and, rolling up his trousers again, although the water-mark was some inches above their utmost elevation, returned to the opposite bank. But no socks were to be found.

"You let 'em drop in the water, sartin as the world!" he exclaimed, giving up the search. Abimelech protested against the injustice of this charge. "O, you're a terrible innocent

boy!"—sitting down and straining at the straps of one of his boots "Now, what's to pay, I wonder? What ye ben puttin' in this boot?"

Mr. Jackwood withdrew his foot, put in his hand, and extracted a stocking.

"If it don't beat all! I remember, now. I did tuck 'em in my boots; an' they're so wet they dropped clean down into the toes."

"Blame me, will ye, next time!" muttered Bim. "O, 'f course I lost 'em in the river!"

"Is that the way to talk to your father?" asked Mr. Jackwood, solemnly. "You better be careful!"

Abimelech continued to mutter; but, his father suggesting significantly that he'd do well to wait till he got his boots on, he hushed, and contented himself with looking sullen. Resuming their tramp, they had not proceeded far, when he began to grumble again, very faintly.

"What's that?" cried his father, sharply, looking around.

"I could a' ketched 'nough fish, if you 'd le' me staid where I was. Might a' know'd we could n't do nothin' down here."

"Where's the fish you did catch?"

"I d'n' know!—I guess I—I left 'em on the ground where you put your boots on!"—beginning to cry.

"Wal, wal, never mind," said Mr. Jackwood; "'t won't take long to go back arter 'em. Cheer up, an' I'll go on an' see what them bushes look like, ahead here."

Ten minutes later, Mr. Jackwood shouted.

"Hurrah, Bim'leah! where be ye?"

"I can't find my fish!" cried the boy; "somebody's come an' stole 'em!"

At that moment there was a vivid flash of lightning, which lit up the entire canopy of the sky, and a heavy drop plashed upon Abimelech's hand. He had explored the bank in vain; while all the time the little willow bough, on which the fish were strung, peeped out of the trampled grass before his eyes. Agitated and blind with tears, he could not see it; and now, in a panic of fear abandoning the search, he attempted to return to his father.

"Here!" shouted Mr. Jackwood, sending up his hat on the end of a pole as a signal, "do ye see this?"

Thrusting the pole into the ground, he was on the point of going in pursuit of the boy, when his attention was attracted by a cry in another direction. He paused and hallooed. The cry was repeated. It sounded like that of some person in distress. Leaving Abimelech, therefore, to make the best of his way out of the grass, Mr. Jackwood advanced upon the rotting timber of a bridge thrown across the creek.

Beyond was an old barn, that stood half hidden by the willows and young elms, festooned with vines, that grew by the stream; and as the voice sounded in that direction, he kept on, until there arose suddenly before him out of the grass what seemed the bent form of an old woman, leaning upon a staff.

"It's some plaguy old witch or 'nother!" he muttered to himself.

She attempted to approach him, whereupon he made a deferential step backwards towards the bridge. Mr. Jackwood had his own opinions about witches.

"O, sir, if you will be so kind as to help me!" she faltered, sinking down again in the tangled grass.

"Wal, I an't a man to pass by on t'other side when there's suff'rin' in the way," said Mr. Jackwood, approaching; "though I'm a little grain skittish about stragglers. What 'pears to be the matter, hey?"

"I have lost my way," answered the woman, faintly, resting her head upon her hand, "and I can go no further."

"Tuckered out, hey? Wal, that's bad! But you can manage to git up to the road, can't ye?"

The woman replied that she was too much exhausted to walk.

"Hoity-toity!" cried Mr. Jackwood, cheerily. "This'll never do. Where there's life there's hope. Only think you can, and you can, you know. B'sides, mebby I can help. You won't be sorry; you'll find a warm supper an' a good comf'table shelter some'eres, I promise ye."

He extended his hand: the woman clasped it convulsively.

"You will be my friend!" she articulated, with strange vehemence — "something tells me that I can trust you!"

"My name's Jackwood; I live on the crick, jest above here. Everybody knows Bim'lech Jackwood," replied the farmer.

"You are my only hope," said the woman, "and I will have faith that you have been sent to me."

"I like that; that 'ere sounds han'some an' pious. But seems to me you don't 'pear quite so old as I took you to be at fust."

"I am not old. I have been obliged to appear so for safety. You will not betray me!"

"Don't be afeared," exclaimed Mr. Jackwood, with hearty sympathy.

"Let me appear to you as I am, then." And the stranger removed a pair of spectacles that concealed her eyes; took off the bonnet that almost covered her face; put back from her forehead the old-woman's cap, with its wig of gray hair attached, and discovered thick masses of dark hair loosened and falling down her neck.

II.

THE STRANGER AND THE STORM.

MR. JACKWOOD stood astonished. Such eyes — such wonderfully soft and lustrous eyes — he had never seen before.

“Why, do tell, now! I never had anything come over me so, in all my born days! Then them ’ere marks on your face t’ look like wrinkles an’t nat’ral, hey?”

“I will go to the water and wash them off,” replied the stranger. “But do not question me, nor ever speak of this.”

At that juncture Abimelech was heard screaming frantically.

“I shall haf to go for that boy, sartin ’s the world!” exclaimed the farmer. “How do ye feel now? Think you can walk a hunderd rods or so?”

“You have given me hope,” said the wanderer; “and hope gives life and strength!”

“That’s more like it! that’s the way to talk! I should n’t wonder if we git home now ’fore it rains, to speak of. Only, when you ’ve washed, if you ’ll make an effort and creep along slow, — this ’ere ’s the track, ye know; keep where the grass is thin, — it ’ll give Bim’lech an’ me a chance, an’ we ’ll overtake you ’fore you git fur.”

And so, with a parting word of cheer, Mr. Jackwood disappeared behind the elms. Left alone, the girl made haste to wash her hands and face; then, having thrown away her staff, and carefully concealed the wig, cap, and spectacles, about her person, she resumed the old bonnet, which corresponded well with the rest of her attire, and set out to walk slowly along the track indicated by Mr. Jackwood.

Abimelech’s voice meanwhile grew fainter and fainter; and,

after a baffling search, his father found him sunk to his knees in the black mud of a slough. Taking him by the arm, he dragged him out, shouldered him, and carried him off bodily.

"Hush up! hush up! You an't dead, arter all. You can't guess what I have found, out here. It's suthin' better 'n two little mis'ble trout."

"Is't a otter?" asked the boy, with a sudden lull in his lamentations.

"You'll see, you'll see. Don't say nothin', but laugh."

Reaching the bridge, Mr. Jackwood set him on his feet, shouldered the fish-poles in his place, and, walking on, pointed out the stranger.

"That's the way you alluz fool me! I thought you'd got suthin'! Heugh! a woman! an' a beggar woman, too!"

"Stop that!" cried Mr. Jackwood. "You talk like a young heathen. An't we commanded to help the needy? What's the use o' your goin' to Sunday-school, I'd like to know?"

"Who is she, any way?"

"Hush!" with a significant motion of the hand. "Hem!" coughed the farmer, preparatory to addressing the stranger. — "Keep a little back, Bim'lech! — Hem! you 'pear to be doin' perty well; feel better, don't ye? If you should take my arm, now, I guess we'll be able to git along finely."

With a word of thanks, feebly spoken, the stranger accepted the offer, — and need enough there seemed that he should assist her weary footsteps. She turned upon him, as she did so, the light of those wonderful eyes, and smiled a grateful smile, which seemed to struggle against embarrassment and fatigue.

"Did you come from the north?"

"Yes, sir," she faltered, — "I mean no, sir. I came, I think, from that direction," — pointing directly at the old Bear Back, the highest and most rugged of the western range of mountains, that bounded the valley. "I followed a road till I lost it in the woods, then I tried to cross the valley."

"You follered that 'ere road? You was travellin' north, then?"

"I am a little confused; I hardly know what I tell you."

"Turned 'round, be ye? Wal, I don't wonder at that. So I shan't ax you no questions. I'd like to inquire, though, if your parents live down north, here."

"My parents?" said the girl, with an effort; "I—I have lost them!"

"O, they're dead, then! I an't none o' the pryin' sort, but I should like to know if their names was Carter. P'rhaps I know'd 'em. That wasn't the name, hey? Wal, I an't goin' to ax questions; but seems to me I've seen you som'eres. Is your name Burbank?"

"No, sir; and I was never in this part of the country before."

"You're a native o' York State, then, I conclude? No? Mebby, then, you've ben to work in the factories, down to Lowell an' Lawrence. I've got a darter 't's talked some o' tryin' her hand at that business; she would, in a minute, if I'd let her. No? Wal, never mind,—I an't one o' the pryin' sort. I forgit, though, what you said your name was."

"Say, father," interrupted Abimelech, at this important crisis, "the rain's comin' like great guns! You can't see the old Bear Back!"

"I guess we'll hurry on a leetle grain faster, if you an't too tired, Miss —— I don't remember your name," said Mr. Jackwood.

"I never heerd the mountain roar so in all my life!" cried the excited Bim. "Do look, father! how the trees thrash about! See 'em! see 'em! all over the mountain! How dark it grows!"

"We shall have it here in a minute," said Mr. Jackwood. "A leetle grain faster, if you can 's well 's not, Miss —— Did I understand you to say your name was ——"

At that moment, a swift squad of the storm, charging down from the mountain with volleys of arrowy rain, swept over our little party. The elm-trees trembled, and reeled, and tossed their long green hair, while the tall grass of the interval rose and fell, and whirled in eddies, like a sea.

"There goes my hat!" screamed Abimelech.

It lodged in the grass, and his father caught it with his fish-pole.

The boy sprang to seize it, and pulled it on his head with such desperation as to tear away the rim, and leave a liberal rent for his hair to flutter through ; and thus, with the appearance of holding himself down by the ears, he scudded on before the gale. His companions followed more slowly ; the stranger, in fluttering attire, clinging to her friend, and Mr. Jackwood, looking solid and responsible under his burden, snuffing the squall complacently, and dragging the fish-poles after.

III.

THE FARM-HOUSE.

THOROUGHLY drenched, the little party arrived at the farmhouse.

"Why! my sakes!" cried Mrs. Jackwood, as the kitchen door flew open, and they came in with the lashing rain, — "I never see! Do shet the door quick, Bim'leeh! Is this 'Tildy Fosdick?"

In the gloom, she mistook her husband's companion for one of the neighbors. Mr. Jackwood corrected the error.

"La, wal! I s'pose we can keep her one night, 't any rate," said his wife. "Soppin' wet, an't ye? Be ye 'fraid o' ketchin' cold?"

"No, I don't think of that," answered the girl, shiveringly.

"Wal, come to the stove, an' warm ye;" and Mrs. Jackwood drew up the high-backed rocking-chair. "Set here. — Phoebe, put in some more wood. I s'pose I might let you have one o' my ol' gowns to put on: I guess I better. You don't look very tough. I'll take your wet bunnit."

Mrs. Jackwood hung the drenched article upon a peg; then, having lighted a candle with a coal she took from the fire, she turned once more to the stranger.

"Dear me!" — betraying a lively emotion, — "you an't stubbid, be ye? You don't look fit to be trav'lin' in this way! Whereabouts is yer home?"

The girl appeared to make an effort to speak.

"Don't be axin' questions, mother!" spoke up Mr. Jackwood. "You see," he added, considerately, in an under tone, "it hurts her feelin's. — I shall have to git ye to speak yer name once more, if ye please."

"Charlotte Woods," articulated the stranger.

"Cha'lotte Woods," repeated the farmer, with an air of thoughtful interest. — "Go 'way, Phoebe," — in a whisper; "don't stan' starin' at her! — There's a Woods under the mountain; is he any relation?"

The girl shook her head. She was apparently seventeen or eighteen years of age; but her features, of delicate mould, and of a soft, brunette complexion, bordering upon the olive, showed traces of passion and suffering rarely seen in one so young. Her eyes were tremulously downcast, and her slender hands clasped across her lap in an attitude of intense emotion. The contrast of her humble drenched attire and the yellow lamp-light that fell upon it served to heighten the effect of the scene. It was at once picturesque and touching. Not even the uncultivated inmates of the Jackwood dwelling were insensible to it; and a respectful hush followed the farmer's last question, all eyes appearing to regard the unknown guest with mingled solicitude and deference.

Mrs. Jackwood broke the silence. "Shall I give you that dry gown to put on?"

"Thank you," said the stranger, "I am quite comfortable."

"Give her a drop o' that 'ere currant wine," whispered the farmer.

"Where's all yer fish?" Mrs. Jackwood at last thought to inquire. "The cat'll eat 'em up, if they're under the stoop."

"I guess all we brought home won't hurt her, if she eats bones an' all," said Mr. Jackwood.

"Why, did n't ye ketch none?"

"I ketched two trout, real nice ones, an' lost 'em," snivelled Bim, in the corner.

"What ye cryin' about?"

"I tore my knee all open! I was runnin' on ahead, an' fell down, right on to a great rock."

"Wal, wal, you'll feel better arter supper," said his father. "You need n't help about the chores to-night. You've had a perty hard time on 't, this arternoon, that's a fact. You won't want to go a-fishin' agin very soon, will ye?"

"I don't want to go to Wild River!" mumbled the aggrieved Bim. "They're the meanest fish! My fust two nibbles was bites, then all my other bites was nibbles."

Meanwhile supper was waiting, only the tea was to be drawn; and Mr. Jackwood proposed that they should "set right down." But the stranger felt too faint to think of food.

"Wal," said Mr. Jackwood, after a moment's reflection, "I guess I'll go an' milk, then, an' have the chores done up 'fore supper. If you git ready to se' down, don't wait for me."

He took the rattling milk-pails from the pantry, and went out in the darkness and storm, to finish the labors of the day. He fed the squealing pigs, and stopped their noise; gave the bleating calves their suppers; drove the sheep out of the door-yard; and returned, at length, to the kitchen, bearing two brimming pails of milk — and rain-water.

He found his guest still sitting by the stove, reposing languidly in the high-backed chair; having, in the mean time, however, put on dry apparel, for which she was indebted to Mrs. Jackwood's kindness.

"Wal, how d'ye find yourself arter your shower-bath?" he inquired, cheerily. "Think ye can eat a little supper, now? Can, hey? That's right; turn right 'round here. Come, Phœbe, — Bim'lech, what ye waitin' fur? Where'll she set, mother?"

"She can set in Bim'lech's place; he's had his supper. He was so hungry, he could n't wait; so he took a bowl o' bread-an'-milk in his hand."

"I did n't eat enough! That was nothin' but a luncheon."

"What! that great bowl o' bread-an'-milk? I wonder what your stomach is made of!"

"Never mind; let him come to the table, if he wants to," said Mr. Jackwood, whose heart grew big and warm in the glow of the homely old kitchen. "There's plenty o' room. Fix him a place, Phœbe. I don't see the need of anybody's starvin' in my house."

Mrs. Jackwood, getting a plate: "It's all foolishness eat'n' two suppers, — one jest 'fore goin' to bed, too; that's all I care about it."

"Bim thinks he deserves two suppers, for bringing home so many fish!" said Phœbe.

Abimelech, exasperated: "Make her stop, father I should think she 'd said enough about that!"

"There, there, there, children, don't quarrel! What makes ye want to pester him so, Phœbe? You should n't mind it, my son; you should be above sich things. There's a plate for ye; bring yer chair along. Hush, now."

The farmer said grace in the stereotype phrase of years; but an allusion to the wanderer beneath his roof, and the wind and the rain without, — awkwardly interpolated, it is true, yet spoken with simple earnestness, — rendered the prayer vital and touching.

"Bim kept making faces at me all the time you was asking the blessing!" said Phœbe.

"Bim'leeh, did you do that 'ere?" asked Mr. Jackwood, solemnly.

Abimelech, with an air of innocence: "No, I did n't! There was a 'skeeter buzzin' 'round my face, an' I squinted to scare him away, that's all. If she had n't ben lookin' she would n't 'a seen me."

Phœbe: "What a story! There an't a mosquito in the house!"

"That'll do! Don't le' me hear no more complaints. We've got plain fare," — the farmer turned to his guest, — "but it's hulsome. Here's good ho'-made bread, an' sweet butter, an' fresh milk; some dried beef, too, if ye like; an' mother'll give ye a good stiff cup o' tea, to raise yer sperrits. Then there's a pie I'll ventur' to recommend, bime-by."

"Mother! I — want — a — piece — of — pie!"

"You need n't whine so like a great baby, if you do! You may give him a piece, Phœbe."

"Phœb' need n't be so p'tic'lar to pick out the smallest piece! I'll have two pieces, now, see if I don't! May n't I, father?"

"Eat that fust, then we'll see."

"I want some cheese with it! Come, you need r^u help me,

Phœb' ! Jest pass the plate, an' le' me help myself. How darned generous you be ! ”

“ Bim'lech ! ”

“ What ! ”

Mr. Jackwood, severely : “ Le' me hear any more sich talk an' you 'll go right away from the table, — mind now ! ”

The boy muttered something in self-defence, with his mouth full ; but his father's attention was at that moment drawn to his guest. For some time she had been vainly endeavoring to eat. The bounty spread before her, the kindness of her new friends, and the thought of rest and shelter while the storm raged without, filled her heart to suffocating fulness ; and, too weak to control her emotions, but instinctively seeking to conceal them, she attempted to rise from the table. The pallor and distress of her features, and the strangeness of her movements, alarmed the farmer ; but, before he could speak, a sudden dizziness seized her, and she sank insensible upon the floor.

“ Marcy ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Jackwood, starting from the table. “ I believe she 's fainted ! Hold her, father, while I bring the camfire ! ”

In her agitation, mistaking the loaf of bread for the lamp, she rushed with it into the pantry, and began to search in the dark for the camphor, — knocking over two or three bottles in the operation, and laying her hand on the right one at the precise moment when it was no longer needed.

At the same time, Phœbe hastened to pour some hot water out of the tea-kettle, with what object in view, she was never very well able to explain. She poured it into the cullender, which happened to be the first utensil in her reach ; and the cullender, acting like a sieve, sprinkled it in a plentiful shower upon her foot. In consequence of this catastrophe, she was nervously occupied in ascertaining the extent of her burns, while Mr. Jackwood was thus left alone to support the form of the fainting girl.

“ A cup o' water ! ” he cried, lifting her to the chair. “ Don't be scart, boy. She 'll come to, arter a little sprinklin'. Be quick ! ”

Abimelech heard only “ cup, sprinkle, quick,” and, actuated by

the same benevolence of impulse which had set his mother rattling the bottles, and his sister pouring hot water, he seized the milk cup from the tea-tray, and spilled its contents partly in the stranger's hair, partly in her left ear.

"Not that!" ejaculated his father. "Don't you know nothing? Water!"

Thereupon the boy caught up one of the empty milk-pails, and, hastening to the sink-room, commenced pumping violently.

By this time the swooning girl began to revive. Indeed, her consciousness had at no time been entirely lost. Her soul had seemed sinking, sinking, like a candle let down into the dark of a deep well; and in a still place, gleaming with a faint ray, just above the waters of oblivion, it had waited, as it were, to be drawn up.

Mr. Jackwood's care was now to wipe away the milk which streaked her hair, and cheek, and neck. Accidentally disarranging her dress in the operation, he started back with an involuntary exclamation of pain and pity. Her full throat was exposed, and just below it, in startling contrast with her soft and gentle beauty, appeared a sharp cut, as of a pointed blade. The wound was evidently not so new but it might have been partially healed; some recent hurt, however, — perhaps the fall from the chair, — had opened it afresh, and now a fine crimson stream was traced upon her breast.

With a quick, instinctive movement, she covered the wound from sight.

"It's nothing; a little hurt," — clasping her hand over her breast.

Mr. Jackwood was speechless with embarrassment; but the cry which had escaped his lips, alarming the family, brought them simultaneously to his relief. Mrs. Jackwood appeared with her camphor-bottle, shaking it up, with her hand over the nose; Phoebe ran up, with a shoe in one hand and the cullender in the other; while Abimelech staggered in from the sink-room, swinging a full pail of milky water.

"There, there, mother!" cried Mr. Jackwood, as his wife began to bathe the patient's forehead; "that'll do; it'll only be unpleasant to her."

"'T won't do no harm," replied the good woman, applying the camphor to the sufferer's nose. "How do you feel now?"

"Better, — quite well," gasped the poor girl, pushing the bottle feebly away.

"Look at Bim!" exclaimed the excited Phoebe. "What are you going to do with that water?"

"Father told me to!" cried Bim. "What you goin' to do with the cullender? You need n't say nothin'!"

"Open yer eyes, if it's as convenient as not," suggested Mr. Jackwood; "I want to see how you look."

The stranger's eyes partly opened, but closed again heavily.

"My eyelids are stiff," she said, with an expression of pain.

"Put some butter on to 'em — that'll limber 'em," whispered the boy, hoarsely, in his father's ear. "Say, shall I?"

"Git away with yer nonsense!" said Mr. Jackwood, with a threatening gesture.

Abimelech recoiled, and sat down, with a startling splash, in the pail of water he had left standing on the floor.

"Now what?" said Mrs. Jackwood, sharply.

"Good enough for him!" exclaimed Phoebe. "He need n't have left the water standing right there in the way. Now bellow, great baby!"

Mr. Jackwood commanded silence. "She's got a dre'ful bad hurt on her breast!" he whispered to his wife; "an' I think he'd better have suthin' done for 't."

"It's not much," said the guest. "If I can be a little while alone. —"

"Take her into your room, mother."

Still holding her hand upon her breast, the sufferer arose, and, with Mrs. Jackwood's assistance, reached the adjoining room. Becoming faint again, she sat down, and, after some hesitation, suffered the good woman to look at her wound.

"Marcy me, if 't an't a cut! It bleeds a stream! Poor thing! — how did you git hurt so?"

"I — I — it was — an accident."

"It looks as though you had been stabbed with a knife! Phoebe, bring me a basin o' water, an' be quick!"

"Cold water?" cried Phoebe.

"Pour in out o' the tea-kettle jest enough to take off the chill," said her mother. "Don't be all night about it!"

Mrs. Jackwood hastened to a tall bureau in the corner, and took from it some linen for the wound.

"What did ye ever have done for 't?" she asked, getting down again beside the guest.

"I can't tell, — not much."

"Did n't you never have no healin' plaster on 't, nor nothin'?"

She moved her head feebly, with a negative sign.

"I want to know! Why did n't ye? Poor child! you must a' suffered from it. How long sence 't was hurt?"

"O dear!" exclaimed Phoebe, in dolorous accents, approaching behind her mother. "What is it? Don't it most kill you?" — The basin began to tip in her hands. "It makes me dizzy to look at it!"

"What are ye doin'?" cried her mother, looking suddenly around, in her kneeling posture. "I never! if you an't spillin' that water all down my back!"

"I could n't help it. I come perty near faintin'!"

"Se' down the basin, and go out and shet the door. Do ye hear?"

Phoebe placed the basin upon a chair, and reluctantly withdrew

Having dressed the wound according to her own ideas of such things, Mrs. Jackwood returned to the kitchen.

"How is she?" asked Phoebe.

"She's jest lopped down on my bed for a little while. Finish yer suppers, childern; I'll 'tend to her. I'm goin' to have her drink a strong cup o' tea, as soon as she gits over her faint spell. Poor girl! she's ever so much to be pitied!"

"She's a downright perty-spoken girl!" said Mr. Jackwood. "I don't know where I've seen sich han'some manners, anywheres. You better tell her, mother, 't seein' to-morrer's Sunday, she might as well make up her mind to stop over with us till Monday, if not longer."

The door was closed, but not latched. Charlotte Woods, as she

lay upon the bed, in the darkened room, could hear all that was said; and a ray of almost heavenly rapture stole, thrilling and soothing, into the troubled depths of her soul. All this time the elements raged without, — the rain lashed the panes, the wind whistled, the lightning winked its fiery eye ever and anon, glaring into the chamber, — and the contrast of the storm with the peace and comfort she had found with her new friends served to intensify all the pure and sweet emotions that arose in her grateful heart. When Mrs. Jackwood returned to her she found her weeping; but her face was illumined, and her eyes glistened with a tender light.

Mr. Jackwood and the children had, in the mean time, returned to the table; and Phoebe amused herself by laughing at Abimelech's pail of water. At first the boy retorted; then he became unaccountably silent, pouting over his pie; and finally, yielding to an irresistible fit of drowsiness, he began to nod assent to all that was said. The unfinished pie-crust had fallen from his hand, and his lips were still distended with the last mouthful, when his deep breathing, growing deeper still, verged upon a snore.

"What ye doin', Phoebe?" demanded Mr. Jackwood.

"Only tickling his nose a little," laughed Phoebe, mischievously.

At that moment Abimelech sneezed, blowing a full charge of pie-crumbs into his bosom. Partially awakened, he half opened his eyes, but, closing them again immediately, with a deep sigh, he rolled over, comfortably, into his father's lap.

"Why could n't ye let the boy alone?" said Mr. Jackwood. — "You're always up to some nonsense!"

"It does me good to plague him. That sneeze came perty nigh taking his head off! I don't suppose he'd have woke up if it had."

"I guess he'd better be put to bed."

"I beg of ye, father," exclaimed Mrs. Jackwood, "don't carry that gre't sleepy-head up-stairs in your arms! He should be made to walk."

"What's the use o' wakin' him when he's fast asleep?" said the farmer.

"I'll carry the lamp," said Mrs. Jackwood, — "if you *will* be so foolish! I've got to go up and fix a bed for that girl."

Half an hour later, having drank the tea prepared for her, and eaten a few morsels of food, Charlotte Woods took leave of the parents, who bade her a kind and cheerful "good-night," and retired, with Phoebe, to her chamber.

The young girl was in a sociable mood, and wished to talk, but the wanderer was too weary to take part in the conversation. Her head had scarce touched the pillow, before she was asleep. But she started strangely, and moaned, and sometimes cried aloud, in the trouble of her dreams. Phoebe was frightened, and awoke her.

"Where am I?"

The storm was raging again; the wind blew, the rain pattered on the roof, the thunder rolled in the sky.

"You are with me, — don't you know?"

"O, yes!" said the wanderer, fervently.

"I was scart, and woke you up," rejoined Phoebe. "You was talking in your sleep."

"Was I? — Did you hear?" cried the other, quickly. "What did I say?"

At that moment a vivid flash, illumining the chamber, showed her starting up with pallid looks, one arm sunk in the pillow, and the other flung across the covering of the bed.

"I could n't make out much," replied Phoebe. "I heard you say, '*Don't! it will kill me!*' and that's all I can remember."

"Are you sure? — Tell me all I said!"

Phoebe could recall nothing more; and the stranger guest, recovering from her alarm, sank again upon the pillow, and listened to the rain on the roof until she was once more asleep.

IV.

THE SABBATH MORNING.

It was day when the wanderer awoke. Through the window-curtain, which looked like a white cotton apron tied by its strings across the sash, the light of a new morning streamed into the room.

How calm and cool it seemed ! At first she felt that she could always lie there, in such sweet peace and languor, and gaze upon that light. But the past rushed with great waves upon her heart, and, becoming restless with anxious thoughts, she arose silently from the bed..

She resumed the faded calico gown Mrs. Jackwood's kindness had furnished ; it was an awkward fit, but it could not altogether conceal the symmetry of her form. Then, standing before a little looking-glass, she combed out her thick, black hair, and, curling it on her fingers, looped it up in luxuriant masses, over her temples. This done, she bathed her face in a tin basin, with water from a broken-nosed pitcher, and, slipping the cotton curtain aside upon its string, sat down by the window.

The storm was over ; the clouds had cleared away ; it was a beautiful Sabbath morning. The low valley, through which wound the stream, lay white-robed in silvery mists ; but all the western range of mountains was flooded with the sunrise.

When Phœbe awoke, and saw her companion sitting there with troubled looks, she felt that she ought to console her.

"I don't believe you like it here very well ; I guess you're homesick."

"O, I do like it ! It is so quiet, so peaceful, here !"

"I think it is a real mean old house," responded Phœbe. "If

father 'd build a new one, and fit it up in style, I don't know, — but, as it is, I'm unhappy as I can be!"

"O," said her companion, "if you could only know what it is to be without a home —"

"Father tells me I don't know how to appreciate a home. But I can't help it; I can't be contented here."

"I suppose, then," said Charlotte, with a tender smile, "you will soon think of changing both your name and abode."

"I won't marry a farmer, any way!" cried Phoebe. "I've always said that, and I'll stick to it, if I live an old maid!"

Her pretty face and bright eyes sparkled with animation; and, arising, the first thing she did was to look in the glass, and read once more the charming tale of her own beauty.

"Father says he bets I'll go through the woods and take up with a crooked stick," she continued, with amusing frankness. "I don't care, — I could have my pick of 'most any of the young fellows about here. But they an't much; they are 'most all farmers' boys; and I'll have a merchant or a lawyer, if anybody."

"Phoebe," called Mrs. Jackwood at the foot of the chamber-stairs, — "an't you 'most ready to come down? You need n't stay up there all day, if it is Sunday. Let *her* lie and sleep, if she wants to; it'll do her good to rest."

So kind an allusion to herself brought the tenderest tearful light to the wanderer's eyes.

"You need n't come down till noon, if you don't want to," said the lively Phoebe. "You won't care to go to meeting, I suppose."

"Hardly," said Charlotte, with a sad smile. "Shall you go?"

"O, yes; I would n't stay away such a day as this, I tell you! I like to see folks when I'm dressed up; it is silly, perhaps, but I can't help it. I don't care for the preaching; we've got a real-stupid minister — I don't ought to say so, though, I suppose. Are you pious? Do you care for what I say?"

Charlotte knew not how to reply to such queer questions.

"Perhaps you belong to the church," added Phoebe, blushing rosy red; "I would n't like to hurt your feelings, though I must say I'm glad I don't belong to it! Mother has urged me and

urged me to join ; she's had the minister here to talk to me hours at a stretch. But the truth of it is, I like to carry on too well ; and I an't going to settle down and put on a long face, and be pious, yet a while ! I thought I experienced religion, one time ; but I guess it didn't amount to much ; there's more fun in me than ever. Well, I wish I was good," — more seriously. " I know I ought to be pious, — but it an't in me."

Charlotte's limbs felt weak and sore ; but she thought it would be better for her to make an effort to move, and she descended the stairs with Phoebe. They reached the kitchen just as Mr. Jackwood was going out, with the milk-pails on his arm. He paused to bid her good-morning ; and she thanked him for his kindness with so much tender feeling that his eyes began to glisten.

" Wal," said he, winking, " make yourself to home ; that'll suit me best of anything. — Come, Bim'lech," turning to his son, " d' ye expect I'm goin' to do all the milkin' in futur', 'cause I let ye off last night ?"

" I'm stiff as I can be," muttered the boy, limping from the corner. " I can't straighten out."

" This comes o' goin' a-fishin'. Come, I'll limber ye up !"

Charlotte was anxious to render Mrs. Jackwood some assistance in her work. At the same time she confessed her ignorance of kitchen affairs.

" Wal, I guess you'd be about as much bother as you're wuth," said Mrs. Jackwood.

" I might soon learn to do something, if you would show me."

" La, sus, I can let ye try, if that's all ! But you'd larn more to look on, I should think. There's so many little chores, Sunday morning, I can't tell myself what's to be done till I come to 't."

Charlotte proved unusually intelligent and apt.

" There's some sense in tryin' to larn you somethin'," said Mrs. Jackwood, encouragingly. " I'm so partic'lar, 't gener'ly I can't bear to have any one lift a finger in my kitchen, without it's Phoebe ; and she sometimes tries my patience a'most to death ! As for them gre't awk'rd Irish girls, — the slouchin' critturs ! — I wor't so much as have 'em 'round !"

Thus encouraged, Charlotte emptied the sour milk Mrs. Jackwood was skimming; helped scald the pans; turned the pork that was frying in the spider; and assisted Phoebe to set the table.

"Wal, you're about the handiest girl 't ever I see. I can't say less 'n that, any way. I wonder you never did house-work before. You take to 't nat'ral as ducks to the water! Some folks never *can* see into 't, somehow; they can't so much as wipe the dishes, say nothin' 'bout washin' 'em, without you stand over 'em every minute o' the time, an' tell 'em how. You've no idee how narrow it makes me feel!"

"I'm afraid I should draw pretty severely on your patience, sometimes," said Charlotte.

"'T would n't be to be wondered at, if you did. The best miss it, now an' then, you know. And I have n't all the patience I should have, or might have, I'm sorry to say. You could put up with a little frettin', though, I guess; it's my natur' to fret."

"Take my word for that!" laughed Phoebe.

"You need 't say that, now!" cried her mother. "I don't think I'm any gre't of a fretter, I'm sure. I consider I'm perty toller'ble patient, now! You won't find many women that 'll put up with what I have to put up with, depend upon 't. Don't say agin I'm a gre't fretter, if you know what 's good for yourself!"

Presently, Mr. Jackwood and Abimelech coming in, the family sat down to breakfast.

"You don't live by eatin', I see," the farmer said to his guest. "You never 'll do for a farmer's darter, till you can eat pork and johnny-cake."

After breakfast Mr. Jackwood took down the big family Bible from the mantel-piece, and, having adjusted a pair of blackened steel-bowed spectacles, opened it on his knee. At the same time Phoebe and Abimelech brought out their Testaments from the bedroom, and, after a little dispute about "the place," obeyed their father, who enjoined silence. Mrs. Jackwood took her seat by the open door, where she could keep an eye on the poultry before the stoop, and flirt her apron at them occasionally, as they attempted to invade the kitchen.

Scarce had the farmer begun to read, when a gallant young turkey, taking advantage of Mrs. Jackwood's contemplative mood, charged past her apron, and made a bold dash at the crumbs under the table.

"Bim'leeh! do help me git this critter out! We must have a whip, and keep it for these nasty turkeys!"

Bim, with warlike resolution: "Clear the track!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "Don't be ha'sh, my son! Don't throw yer book!"

She spoke too late. The boy's Testament whizzed by the corner of the table, and, glancing on the back of Phoebe's chair, fluttered down into a dish of grease on the stove-hearth.

"Now you've done it!" cried Phoebe.

Mrs. Jackwood, quivering: "I've as good a mind to box your ears as ever I had t' eat!"

"'Tan't hurt much," said Abimelech, grinning, as he held the Testament up by the leaves, to let the grease drip off.

"Every Sunday mornin'," began Mrs. Jackwood, "reg'lar as the day comes 'round, that 'ere grease-dish has to come out o' the suller-way, an' set *smutcherin'* on the stove, till the shoes are all blacked for meetin'! For my part, I'm heartily sick on 't; an' if I could had my way, this never 'd a' happened."

"Come, come! don't be unreason'ble mother," said Mr. Jackwood. "Accidents will happen."

"Unreasonable? If you 'd make a bizness on 't, you could set down and warm the dish, an' grease yer shoes, an' done with 't, all in five minutes' time. An' here that thing's ben 'round a hull hour, if 't has a minute! Then Bim'leeh had to fling his book! An' now he's lettin' the grease drop all over the floor! I never see the beat! There!"

Mrs. Jackwood gave vent to her feelings in a sharp cuff bestowed on Abimelech's ear.

Bim, howling: "Ow — w — w — w! Quit!"

"Quit, quit!" echoed the turkey, darting behind the stove.

"Don't tell me to quit!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackwood, addressing Bim more particularly, "you sauce-box!"

In terror of another blow, Bim dropped the book and dodged behind Charlotte's chair.

"Come, let's have peace, this holy Sabbath mornin'!" said Mr. Jackwood. "Bim'lech, take yer seat, and look over with Phœbe!"

Mrs. Jackwood, endeavoring to control her feelings, but still quivering with excitement, stooped to pick up the book.

"Grease an' all on this clean floor, mopped only yist'day! It's no more use moppin' an' scourin' in this house than — Gi' me a knife, Phœbe!"

"I — gracious!" cried Bim, with a wild look, throwing up his hands in a protective attitude about his ears.

"We're waitin' mother," observed Mr. Jackwood, quietly.

"You'll have to wait till I scrape up a little of this grease, 'fore it's trod all over the house. — Where's that turkey?"

"He's out o' the house," snarled Bim, "an' I wish I was!"

"Don't talk so," said Mr. Jackwood. "Remember, there's a stranger present. Now, if you're all ready, we'll read."

Mrs. Jackwood resumed her station in the door-way, and, setting the broom as a trap to be sprung upon the poultry, composed herself to listen.

"Commence, Bim'lech," said the farmer.

Bim'lech, sullenly: "Han't got no book!"

"I told ye to look over with Phœbe. Third varse."

Bim mumbled over his task, as if merit consisted in the most rapid and indistinct utterance that could be called reading.

"Bim'lech, read that 'ere last varse over ag'in, an' try to take the sense on 't."

"Phœbe won't le' me look on! She holds the book 'way off!"

"Anybody'd think you wanted to eat the book up!" — and Phœbe mischievously thrust her Testament under the boy's nose. "Now can ye see?"

"Come! — stop! I swanny, I won't read another word!"

"Take holt o' that book, my son, an' don't le's have any more o' yer nonsense. This is perty work for Sunday mornin'!"

Phœbe giggling; Abimelech pouting; Mr. Jackwood looking sternly over his glasses at the offenders; Charlotte trying to be serious, but laughing, with her sunny eyes, in spite of herself.

Mrs. Jackwood: "Shoo! shoo!" — flirting her apron at the turkeys. "Git away with ye!"

At length, peace restored, the reading was concluded, — an entire chapter of the Acts having been dispensed for the edification of the household circle. Half a chapter was the usual allowance; but a double portion was adjudged appropriate for Sunday, which seemed to afford more time for such devotions than weekdays are supposed to do.

Having made a few remarks on the text, Mr. Jackwood, kneeling over the Bible in his chair, prayed with a certain earnestness, which bore up Charlotte's soul on wings of devotion. But the children's hearts were untouched; it was a threadbare prayer to them: although kneeling reverently, they occupied themselves in whispering, pinching, and making faces at each other, all in a quiet way, until it was concluded. Mrs. Jackwood was sufficiently serious for the occasion; yet she could not keep her eyes off the turkeys, nor refrain from shaking her skirts at them when they approached the door.

The morning devotions ended, Mr. Jackwood got out his shaving apparatus; raised a lather which made his face look like a mighty ice-cream; honed his razor; and, perching the kitchen looking-glass on the window-frame, stood before it, with his feet well braced for the operation, and proceeded to take off his "baird." Mrs. Jackwood washed the dishes, and Charlotte wiped them, while Phœbe and Abimelech quarrelled over their Sunday-school lesson, which they were pretending to study together in the bed-room.

Employment diverted Charlotte's mind; but when there was nothing more for her to do, she became despondent. In vain she endeavored to repay the kindness of her friends with cheerful looks and words. The tears would start, the sighs would swell up from the deep well of trouble in her breast.

Mr. Jackwood felt that he ought to say something to comfort her. "You an't growin' impatient, an' thinkin' o' leavin' on us, be ye?" he cried, coming out of the bed-room, with his Sunday shirt on. "Of course you would n't wish to be travellin' on the Sabbath? — Here, mother," turning to look for his wife, — "you'll have to button my rizbuns, arter all. Where be ye?"

"Let me button them, if you please," said Charlotte.

"Them don't look like farmers' wives' hands," observed Mr. Jackwood, submitting the wristbands; "they're nimble enough, though; I guess they might be made useful, don't you?"

"I should be glad to make them so, indeed!"

"Would ye, though? There's chances enough for that, I should think. You'd want some lady-like occupation, though, I s'pose."

"I would not care much what it was," said the girl, "if I could see, now and then, a kind face!"

"Wal, wal!" — cheeringly, — "suthin' 'll turn up, if you put your trust in Providence, — that's sartin. At all events, we'll agree to keep ye till there does."

"Now, father!" remonstrated Mrs. Jackwood, entering at that moment, "don't make no rash promises, I beseech!"

"O," said their guest, quickly, "I could not accept your kindness, if I would! I ought," — a heavy shade of trouble darkened her face, — "I know I ought to go — perhaps to-day!"

"Tut, tut! that's nonsense!" returned the hospitable farmer "We can keep ye for a few days, jes' 's well 's not."

"Why do you, father?" said Mrs. Jackwood, aside. "I've nothin' agin the girl; an' I mus' confess she's about the handiest person, for one t han't ben thoroughly drilled in housework, 't ever I see. But we don' know nothin' who she is, nor where she come from, nor nothin' 't all about her; so it stan's us in hand to be careful."

Mr. Jackwood was struck with the force of the observation. But, turning to Charlotte, and looking into those deep, earnest eyes, his wife's argument melted before them like frost in the sun.

"Wal, we'll talk it over to-morrow. But, take my word for't," — with a cheering glance at his guest, — "'t'll all turn out right in the end."

In a little while Mr. Jackwood and the children went off to meeting in the one-horse wagon, driving the old white mare — an establishment of which Phoebe, to use her own expression, was "ashamed as she could be." Charlotte watched until they were out of sight, and still sat gazing anxiously from the window, while Mrs. Jackwood finished the Sunday morning "chores."

"I'm tired," at length said the farmer's wife, "an' I'm goin' to lop down a few minutes on the bed. You can come in an' set by me, if ye like."

The truth is, Mrs. Jackwood wished to keep an eye on Charlotte. "Appearances are desaitful," she reasoned, "an' there's no knowin' what may happen!" With this view, she took a newspaper, to keep herself awake when conversation failed.

"I declare!" she exclaimed, suddenly, as she read, "what a strange thing that was happened the other day! Have you heard about it?"

She read a few paragraphs, while the other listened oreathlessly.

"There's more about it, in fine print; but that 'pears to be the substance. Had n't you heard nothin' of it?"

"I—I believe I heard some men talking about it, yesterday," faltered Charlotte; "but I did n't know where it happened. How far is the place from here?"

"I don't know; it's out in York State somewheres."

Charlotte breathed again, passing her hand across her pallid face. At the same time Mrs. Jackwood, although fully determined not to fall asleep, closed her eyes, letting the newspaper sink gradually upon the bed. Having favored the first advances of an insidious temptation, and turned her face towards the sweet garden of sleep, she ended, as mortals are prone to do, by yielding a second step, and then a third, until, with the very best resolutions in the world, she passed the gate of slumber, and sank down upon a deep poppy-bed, where a troop of mischievous sprites, called dreams, seized her, and transported her into the inmost recesses of the enchanted garden.

Then Charlotte, with stealthy hand, took up the paper, and glanced hurriedly over the columns. Finding the place where Mrs. Jackwood had been reading, she went over, with burning interest, the portions that had been omitted; then laying down the paper, without awakening the good woman, she glided noiselessly from the room.

V.

HECTOR.

THE evening was soft and warm. The sky spread calm and starry above the sultry city. The houses were thrown open to catch the breath of a light south wind that blew gently up the bay. Many of the inhabitants were in the streets, sitting before their doors, or strolling up and down; while upon the river the negro bargemen sang their wild and plaintive melodies, in the moonlight that shone over the water.

At ten o'clock, two young men landed from a pleasure-boat, and walked arm-in-arm into the town.

"Here we are again," said one, pointing with his cane. "It is on this corner we met. Well, we have had a pleasant sail, and I have you to thank for it."

"I stifle," returned the other, "in these close streets. When I look up at the stars, I would fly! How cool, how far-off, how pure, they are!"

"You are homesick, Hector."

"No, Joseph, — but a little heart-sick! Life seems so rotten here, my hands feel slimy with it, and I reach up instinctively, as if to wash them in the light of the stars. What is the great end of existence, Joseph?"

"Upon my word," cried Joseph, "I don't know!"

"You have lived too long in this contagious atmosphere of vice!" rejoined Hector. "There is danger here of forgetting what the word existence means. Do you not often start, and cry out, 'Is this humanity? am I a part of it? who are we? what are we? why do we exist?'"

"When I dwell upon such things," answered Joseph, "I have the blue devils horribly!"

"The thought haunts me continually. It tyrannizes over me like conscience. Night and day, wherever I go, whatever I see or do, the inexorable voice whispers, 'To what end is it all?'"

"Will you tell me what you live for?"

"I live for LOVE!" exclaimed Hector.

"You!" laughed his companion. "Do you know that, with all the ladies of my acquaintance, you have the reputation of being the coldest and most indifferent mortal in the world?"

"With the ladies of your acquaintance!" repeated the other, significantly. "I like the compliment! But, let me tell you, there is an ocean of love palpitating and throbbing in that heart they find so cold. It waits for a possessor."

"Which you will never find!"

"In truth, I do not expect it. I take leave of southern society in a few days; I go home to my native Vermont, to spend a solitary summer among the mountains. There is nothing for me there but thought and study. And as for Mobile, I have had strange experiences here; I have learned something of woman's heart, in spite of my coldness; but it is all in the past, thank heaven! and nothing will ever allure me here again."

"You are right!" said Joseph, thoughtfully. "I wish I was going with you. Rob Greenwich is up that way somewhere, is he not?"

"Where Rob Greenwich is, it's not easy to say. He goes where passion leads him,—not like you and me, dear Joseph!" said Hector, ironically. "But, if you ask where his home is, I can tell you. It's in the village of Huntersford, about a mile and a half from my father's house. I will show it you when you come to visit me this summer."

"I?—That's out of the question, unless I marry a rich wife, and go north for a wedding tour."

"Well, do that, and you shall have a double welcome."

"If I had your opportunities," said Joseph, "perhaps I might. My friendship will never forgive you for not marrying Helen. She is rich, beautiful, and charming; more than all, she loves you—"

"A woman," cried Hector, "who holds human property; who must have her slaves to wait upon her; who would not give them up even for me! Judge how well she loves me! But we will not discuss that question. Take her, if you can get her, black servants and all. And now good-night. You have an engagement, and are anxious to get rid of me."

"True," said Joseph, "I have a call to make; but —"

"No compliments. We part here. Joseph, be worthy of the name!"

Leaving his friend to proceed alone, Hector turned a corner, and walked, with folded arms, along a street brilliant with lighted saloons. The doors of these places were thrown open, pouring floods of yellow light upon the street, and exposing all the allurements of dissipation within, from the well-furnished bar to the gay and voluptuous pictures that adorned the walls.

Into one of these, led by the same habit of observing human nature which had prompted his visit to the south, Hector Dunbury strolled abstractedly. It was a celebrated saloon, called the "Revolver," either in honor of the weapon so named, or in consequence of a certain rotary motion with which the brains of its patrons were apt to become familiar. The sign above the door favored both these ideas, — showing on one side the device of a huge six-shooting pistol, and on the other that of a jolly gentleman reeling under the weight of one glass of liquor in his hand, and several more in his head.

Within, conversation, music, and dancing, together with the fine arts, or rather the coarse arts, added their charms to the attraction of the bar. The music was by an itinerant performer, who exercised a feeble violin, with an accompaniment of bells which he jingled with one foot, a triangle which he sounded from time to time with the other, and a pair of cymbals played between his knees. The dancing was by two artists, a male and a female. The one, a cotton-dealer, of "respectable" standing in southern society, carried away by the enthusiasm of over-strong potations, had volunteered a double pigeon-wing, in a style that would have somewhat astonished his mercantile connections in New York and Boston. The female was no other than a learned duck, had in

charge by a ragged urchin, the fiddler's companion, who excited her to a noble emulation of the cotton-dealer's extraordinary performance.

At the bar, Hector called for a glass of lemonade.

"No fire in it for me!" he exclaimed, as the bar-tender was about to dash some brandy into the tumbler.

"Lemonade?" echoed a dark, bearded individual, on his left, inclining over the bar. "The same for me — with a good deal of the extra. In short, make it a punch. And you, Dickson?"

"Yes, doctor, if you please," said a third customer, thickly.

"If I please?" cried the doctor. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Dickson, "only I'm considerable affected by the music."

"Do ye call that music?" cried his companion. "I'll make better with a saw-file and a pair of tongs!"

"Recollect," said the bar-tender, "that, six weeks ago, that man had never seen a fiddle."

"He plays well, for six weeks!" observed Dickson, with drunken gravity.

"You swallow such a story as that in your liquor!" retorted the doctor. "I'm ashamed of you!"

And he playfully thrust his friend's hat over his features, like an extinguisher.

"I said," gasped Dickson, struggling out of his hat, and looking up with a ludicrous expression of bewilderment, "I said — where is what I said? I dropped it as a candid remark," — and he looked about him as if expecting to find it on the counter, or on the floor. "Who knocked my hat over my eyes?"

"T was the lemonade gentleman, I reckon," replied the doctor. "He appears anxious to apologize. As for your marvellous fiddler," — and he turned his back, while Dickson staggered fiercely upon Hector.

"O, as for him," said the bar-tender, "I can prove that he had never seen a fiddle six weeks ago. Perhaps you'd like to take a bet."

"Well, I reckon!" cried the doctor. "I'll go the drinks for the company."

"All right!" returned the other. "The man is blind!"

"Sold, by Jove!" shouted the doctor, flinging his hat across the room.

At that moment a thickly-articulated cry for help was heard; the doctor recognized his own name, and the voice of a friend. It was Dickson, whose drunken attack upon Hector had proved something of a failure, and who now, in consequence, lay in a disagreeable heap under the table, where he was trying to open the wall, mistaking it for the door.

Meanwhile, Hector had taken his seat in the corner, with his lemonade before him. Declining the doctor's invitation to the bar, he sat looking on, with a listless expression, while the rest of the company celebrated the bet. The blind man was led up by the ragged urchin, who grinned over his gin-and-sugar with the men at the bar, and smacked his lips afterwards, as if he loved it.

The company then, becoming hilarious, formed a ring to observe the duck dance. Among other amusing feats the wonderful biped performed, was that of recognizing the medical faculty, and saluting them in the crowd. Her sagacity in that respect was fairly tested, the betting doctor being the subject. Stopping before him, in her waddling rounds, she uttered the characteristic cry, —

"Quack! quack!"

A shout of exultation from the spectators. The doctor, excited, offered to wager that the experiment would not succeed a second time. The bet taken, he changed his position; and once more the duck, waddling about the floor to the blind fiddler's music, stopped suddenly, and, bobbing her head up and down, politely saluted the doctor.

"Quack! quack! quack!"

The applause was tremendous. Some drunken fellows fell down upon the floor, and rolled and roared. The doctor's eyes flashed.

"Who says that's true?"

Dickson, who had by this time crept from under the table, muttering revenge, indicated Hector with his tipsy fist. The doctor marched up to the young man, in a blustering way, and demanded an apology.

Hector sipped his lemonade coolly, but made no reply.

"Do you know who I am?" hissed the doctor.

"No," replied Hector, "unless I am to take the duck's word."

"You are a liar!" articulated the doctor, with choking passion.

The next instant, the contents of Hector's glass were streaming from his brows, and eyes, and beard; and Hector stood upon his feet, pale, but firm, grasping the empty tumbler in his hand.

As the doctor staggered back from the shock, his hand instinctively found its way to his bosom, where it came in contact with the handle of a pistol. He drew it, and levelled it at Hector. But quick as thought it flew to the ceiling, struck up by a swift blow from his adversary's hand.

At this juncture, the courageous Dickson made a sally in favor of his ally, with a chair upon his head. Hector leaped aside, and the blow intended for him fell upon the crown of the dancing cotton-dealer. At the same time, the doctor rushed forward with a brandished knife.

"Take care!" cried Hector, stepping back.

There was something in his tone and look which betokened a roused and dangerous spirit. The doctor might have been warned; but his passion blinded him, and, with an oath, showing his firm-set, glittering teeth, under his curled moustache, he aimed a blow at the young man's breast. On the instant, the empty glass, which was Hector's only weapon, was shattered in the face of his antagonist; who, stunned and gashed, dropped upon one knee, letting fall his weapon, and supporting himself with his hand upon the floor.

Hector was unhurt; and, the moment he saw his adversary down, he sprang to raise him up, and helped him to a chair.

"Dickson!" cried out the doctor, in accents of pain and rage, endeavoring to wipe the blood from his eyes; "by ——! Dickson!"

A violent tumult had arisen in the saloon. Dickson was in the midst of it, and unable to render his friend any assistance.

"O, — furies!" articulated the doctor. "Lives shall pay for this!"

"We will talk of that," said Hector. "But first let me look to your wound. I sought no quarrel; but it is my way to defend myself."

The doctor was not dangerously hurt. His brow was cut, and the blinding blood that streamed down into his eyes rendered him incapable of offering any opposition. Hector removed the fragments of glass from the wound, and tied his own handkerchief about it, to staunch the blood.

By this time, the police having been alarmed, five or six drunken officials, with badges upon their hats and bricks in them, reeled into the saloon, swaggering and swearing.

The ragged urchin, the duck, and the blind fiddler, were the first offenders seized. This was natural, they being not only quite innocent, but incapable of resistance. The police next laid hands upon the cotton-dealer, who, discomfited, sat in Turkish fashion upon his supple legs, in a corner, looking hazily about him, as if vainly endeavoring to comprehend what was going on. After him, the pugnacious Dickson, laid away once more under his favorite table, and fighting heavily with his enemies, disguised as table-legs, was dragged out by the heels, and placed under arrest.

The police, however, took good care to avoid meddling with such persons as swore terribly and flourished weapons. With them discretion was not only the better part of valor, but the whole of justice. Hector, therefore, who exercised neither pistols nor profanity, bid fair to become the next victim. He stood, with calm dignity, confronting the officers, when a demonstration on the part of the doctor caused a diversion in another direction.

The latter had been some moments on his feet, looking about him savagely from beneath his bandaged brows, for his bowie-knife, which Hector had kicked under the chair; and, now perceiving it, he clutched it fiercely, and rushed upon his late antag-

onist. Hector's back was towards him; and the armed hand was already raised to smite him, when a policeman, seizing the opportunity, stepped behind the assailant, and felled him to the floor. Hector was untouched; and while the officers rushed upon the doctor to secure his weapons and bind his hands, the young man, taking quite an unceremonious leave of the company, walked quietly and quickly out at the door.

"O, corruption! O, death!" he exclaimed, in accents of loathing, as he fled from the spot. He shook the dust from his feet; and, perceiving a fountain running in the street, stooped instinctively to wash his hands. When he would have wiped them, he remembered that he had bound his handkerchief upon his adversary's head.

"It is well!" said he. "I have left my garment with them!"

The tumult in the saloon partially subsiding, the bar-tender managed, by shouting, to make himself heard. The officers showed a liberal disposition to listen to the man, whose liquor they drank much oftener than they paid for it; and on his representations, the cotton-dealer — a valuable customer — was set at liberty before he had become fully conscious of his arrest. Dickson and the other prisoners were released at the same time; excepting the doctor alone, reserved as a sacrifice to public justice.

"Do what ye please with me," muttered the latter, as one of the officers put on his hat for him over his bandaged brows. "I've only one suggestion to make. Le's liquor!"

The police sympathizing with this generous sentiment, their feelings were so much softened, that they at once proceeded to undo his hands, to afford him the gratification of paying for the treat out of his own pocket. This done, he swallowed a potent comforter for his griefs, in the form of a glass of fiery spirits, and set out to accompany an officer to the watch-house.

Stopping occasionally to refresh themselves by the way, always at the doctor's expense, officer and prisoner alike forgot their relative positions and their original destination. The doctor

talked desperately of revenge ; and so far enlisted the sympathies of his guide, that the latter not only promised to assist him in ascertaining Hector's name and address, but, arrived at a street-corner, he restored his weapons, and shook hands with him, swearing an eternal friendship, and bidding him an affecting good-night.

Then, while the faithful guardian of the town moved off unsteadily, bent on still further exploits in behalf of the public peace, the doctor, examining his pistol and muttering by the way, sought the calm precincts of domestic peace, where his affectionate wife awaited his return.

VI.

GRANDMOTHER RIGGLESTY.

A RHEUMATIC old lady, in a brown bonnet and a faded bombazine dress, with a fussy shawl about her neck, arrived at the Excelsior House in the afternoon stage. Alighting with difficulty, with her arms full of bundles, she gathered herself up on the step, sneezed twice, and scrutinized the crowd of loungers with an inquisitive scowl.

"Is anybody here knows Bim'lech Jackwood?" she inquired, wrapping the fussy shawl more closely about her neck. "An' has anybody seen him, this arternoon?"

Everybody appeared to know Mr. Abimelech Jackwood, but nobody appeared to have seen him that afternoon.

"It's the strangest thing! Here I wrote to Bim'lech's folks more'n a week ago —— There, Mister — you driver! I knowed that ban'box would git jammed, an' I telled ye so. It's so strange, folks can't be a little mite keerful! Don't tear that trunk all to, pieces now, gitt'n on 't down! I wish you'd hand me that pa'cel I dropped 'fore it gits trod on. — That's the wust stage! I shan't git over it in my j'int's — I do'no' when!"

"Supper, ma'am?"

"No, I guess not; I've got some lunch in my bag. I s'pose," — the old lady smiled persuasively, — "if Bim'lech's folks don't come perty soon, you can jest gi' me a cup o' tea in my hand, can't ye, without much charge? I don't keer for milk an' sugar."

She sat down on her baggage, while, at her request, the land-lord sent across the way, and ascertained that a letter, post-marked Sawney Hook, and addressed to Abimelech Jackwood, had ain in the post-office several days.

"And it's there yit!" exclaimed the old lady. "Did ever anything in this world happen jest like that! Send a letter to say you're comin' — pay the postage on 't, too — I'm provoked! You don't know nobody 't 's goin' right by Bim'leech's, do ye, 't I can ride with 's well 's not? I don't re'ly feel 's tho' 't I could afford to hire a wagon a-puppus."

It chanced that one of Mr. Jackwood's neighbors was about starting for home, and could carry her directly to his house. But, on being introduced, the neighbor said, evasively, that he had come to the village on a "buck-board," and could not, conveniently, carry so much baggage.

"I'll leave the bulk on 't for Bim'leech, then, an' take jest these 'ere bundles in my lap. I wonder who it was invented buck-boards, — spring-boards, they call 'em to Sawney Hook. I never could like 'em. Jest a long teeterin' board, from the fore ex to the hind ex, with nothin' but a seat in the middle, — not a bit of a box, nor no nothin' but the fills an' wheels!"

Unsocial neighbor: "You're not obliged to ride on one."

"O, I don't find no fault, no way! I look upon 't as a lucky chance!" — in a conciliatory tone. "Bim'leech Jackwood is a son-in-law of mine. His wife, Betsy Rigglessty that was, is my darter. Don't ye think I can take this ban'box along, an' hold it 'tween our feet? I'm 'most afraid to leave it. — O, wait a minute, sir! my umbrel'! I shall want it to keep the wind off 'm my neck, ridin'. Landlord," whispering mysteriously, "see here a minute! Is that 'ere a drinkin' man? He's very red-faced, an' I am sartin I smelt his breath."

"He's an Englishman," said the landlord, "but a perfect gentleman, you'll find him."

"It can't be Mr. Dunbury, can it? Laws sakes! I should n't 'a knowed him, — tho', to tell the truth, I never see him more 'n two times 't I know on. I wish you'd jest tuck my shawl up around my bunnit a little, so the wind shan't strike to my back. Now, if you'll hand me this 'ere bag arter I git into that hateful spring-board —"

A minute later, with her bundles in her lap, and her faded blue cotton umbrella, of huge dimensions, spread over her left shoulder,

the old lady might have been seen riding along the village road with the unsocial neighbor.

"This is Mr. Dunbury, I believe?" — talking loud, to make herself heard under the umbrella.

The unsocial neighbor heartily wished, just then, that it was n't Mr. Dunbury. Although a man of fallen fortunes, much of the naughty Englishman's pride — now grown sensitive and sore — adhered to him in his depressed condition; and he experienced a sort of inward fury at the thought that he, a Dunbury, should ever be placed in so ridiculous a position. He acknowledged his identity, however, in a forbidding growl.

"Mebby ye don't remember me?" shouted the old lady under her fortification. "I ben up here to visit my relations three times in my life; an' I recollect the Dunburys. How's Mis' Dunbury? Does she have the spine now? or was it Mis' Wing had a spine in her back? I 'most forgit. There! I declare for 't!"

The old lady, struggling to arrange her umbrella, so as to defend herself at all points from the fresh air, sadly to the annoyance of the irritable Englishman, whose face and eyes were endangered, had brought affairs to a pleasant crisis, by quietly knocking off his hat.

"Le' me git off 'n git it," she proposed. "Shan't I? If you'll jest hold my umbrel' an' bundles —"

"Sit still!" muttered her companion, jumping to the ground.

There were plenty of spectators to witness his discomfiture; and, to make matters as bad as possible, the old lady raised her voice to a shrill pitch, as he went back to recover his property.

"You see, if 't had been anything but a spring-board, — if there'd been any sort or kind of a box to the wagon, — your hat would 'a fell into it, an' you would n't had to git out."

The neighbor made no reply, but, taking his property out of the dirt, with flushed dignity, put it upon his head, stalked back to the vehicle, and drove on in silent rage. As he did not speak again, until, arrived at Mr. Jackwood's house, he made haste to set her down at the gate, she considered herself shamefully treated.

"I much obleeged for your very kind politeness!" she remarked,

with grisly sarcasm. "Had 't I better pay ye suthin' for yer trouble?"

The Englishman's sense of the humorous getting the better of his mortification, he told her gravely that he would consider fourpence a fair compensation.

"I declare," she stammered, looking blank and perplexed, "I hardly expected ye 'd make a charge on 't — but I 'm sure," — she fumbled in her purse, — "if three cents would be an object. — Git out! you nasty thing!" — to Rover, who ran out, barking, and leaped upon her dress. — "Strange to me people will keep a yelpin' cur!"

Mr. Dunbury drove away whilst she was still fumbling for the change.

"Good riddance!" she muttered; "I should have begrudged him the fust cent; for he 's a drinkin' man, and I 'd know 't would go straight for liquor. Is this Phoebe?"

"You 're my gran'mother Rigglesly, an't you?" cried the delighted Phoebe, springing to kiss her venerable relation.

"My sakes! how you have growed, child!" A smile thawed the old lady's hard visage a little on the surface, like spring sunshine on frozen ground. "How 's mother an' Bim'leeh? — Git out, you sir!" — to Rover, with a kick, — "tearin' that 'ere ban'box to pieces! There!"

"Ki-yi! ki-yi!" yelped the dog.

"Pups is the hatefulest critturs! an' I detest a yaller pup above all! Take in that 'ere ban'box, dear. That grouty Englishman had to throw it right down by the gate, as if 'twan't nothin' more'n a chunk. He 's the sourest, disagreeable-est man! Phaugh!" — with a gesture of disgust, — "how his breath smelt!"

"Why did n't ye write to let us know you was comin'?" cried Mrs. Jackwood. "You thought you 'd take us by surprise, hey?"

"Why did n't I write?" echoed the old lady. "Don't none o' your folks ever go to the post-office, I wonder? Bim'leeh was allus jes so slack, and allus will be, to the day of his death, fu 's I know! I wrote you a week ago yis'day, an' the letter 's in the office up here now."

"Mother, let Bim go right down and get it," cried the mortified Phoebe.

"It'll do a sight o' good to send for 't now! Bim'leeh may tackle up an' go for my things, though, as soon as ye please. Do shet the door arter ye!" to Phoebe, who ran out to call her father. "I'm in a perty state to set in a draft of air! You'll have to larn to shet doors arter ye, if I stay here."

Seated in the rocking-chair, in the kitchen, the old lady took an unfinished stocking from her bag, and began to knit industriously. Presently she paused, ceased rocking, closed her eyes and opened her mouth, scowling and drawing in her breath, as if to provoke a sneeze. Having succeeded in getting off a powerful double sternutation, she hastened to huddle herself into the corner, looking peevishly about the room.

"I'm ketchin' cold, sure as this world! I ben feelin' a draft on my neck ever sence I sot down; but I could n't tell, for the life o' me, where 't come from. I allus telled Bim'leeh this was the wust, wind-leakiest house 't could possibly be contrived; but there's never ben the fust thought o' repairs done on 't, I warrant, sence I was here: Bim'leeh's so shif'liss!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "O, wal, mother, we have to git along the best we can, ye know. We can't afford extravagance."

Old lady: "But you might be decent and comf'table, 'tall events. Bim'leeh was allus fussin' 'bout suthin' 't wan't o' no arthly kind o' use, while things 't ought to be 'tended to all went to loose ends. If you was right smart, and had your say 'bout things as you'd ought to have, things 'u'd look a little different round here, I tell ye!"

These remarks were interrupted by Phoebe and Bim, who came running a race to the house, followed, more soberly, by their father.

"Dear me! how rude ye be, childern!" cried the old lady, with a painful contortion of face. "You're enough to take one's head off!"

"Pheeb tickled my back, through the hole in my shirt, with a darned old pigweed!" cried Bim; "and I'm goin' to pay her!"

"O! what a voice!" ejaculated the old lady, with a tortured expression. "It goes through me jest like a knife!"

"Bim'lech, this is your gran'mother," said Mrs. Jackwood.

"I know it," replied Bim, showing his teeth with a good-natured grin.

"Why don't you speak to her, an' not be so boisterous?"

"I d'n' know what to say," said the boy, lowering his voice, and looking sheepish.

"Can't ye gi' me a sweet kiss, now?" asked the old lady, laying her knitting on her lap; "Phoebe did."

Abimelech, giggling: "I do' wanter!"

Old lady: "You d'n' know what I got for ye in my chist. Mebb'y it's a jack-knife, now, — who knows?"

The boy was almost persuaded; but, somehow, he could not discover anywhere on the old lady's face a spot smooth enough to kiss, except the tip of her nose; so he concluded not to indulge. He afterwards had no occasion to regret his self-denial, the reputed jack-knife in the old lady's chest turning out to be a complete hoax.

Old lady, resentfully: "Wal, you 're a notty boy, — an' notty boys don't git no presents. — How do you do, Bim'lech?" reaching out her hand to Mr. Jackwood.

Mr. Jackwood greeted her heartily; and how was she herself?

"O, I an't a bit well," — releasing his hand immediately, and resuming her knitting. "An' more'n all that I never expect to be. My constitution's all broke to pieces. I've a dre'ful rheumatiz. An' what's wus'n all, there's nobody in this world 't has the least mite o' charity for me, or pity on my sufferin's."

Taking from her bag a cotton handkerchief, embellished with a print of the Good Samaritan, she wiped her eyes on it, and put it back again. Then, observing that everybody was very much distressed, she assumed an air of grim satisfaction over her knitting.

"Wal, wal, gran'mother," said Mr. Jackwood, sympathetically, "you'll have your reward; if not here, hereafter."

"I've giv' up expectin' anything in this life," she whimpered, pulling out the Good Samaritan again. "Here I've slaved an' slaved, all my days, an' brought up a large family of childern, an'

educated 'em well as childern ever need to be educated, an' gin 'em all a good settin' out when they got married — an' that's all the thanks I git for 't!"

"O, no, no, mother!" cried Mr. Jackwood, cheerily.

The old lady pursued her knitting, while the tears ran ostentatiously down her cheeks.

"I han't a child in the world, but that wishes me out o' the way, — for I an't nothin' but a burden now to nobody!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "Don't, mother, talk so, an' give way to your feelin's!"

Old lady: "O, wal, if I distress people, I s'pose I mus' n't. It's the duty of ol' people to give up, when they've wore themselves out in doin' for their childern; it's a sin to speak on 't, or complain. O, wal," — drying her eyes on the Good Samaritan, — "I 'll be more keerful in futur'."

Finding the scene too painful, Mr. Jackwood went out to harness the horse, in order to go for the old lady's baggage.

"I'm real sorry she's come here to stop," said Bim. "We can't have no fun while she's around."

Mr. Jackwood: "Hush up! You mus' n't talk so. It's your duty to love her, an' make things pleasant for her."

Abimelech: "How can a feller? — Say, Pheeb!" — to his sister, who ran out to speak for some "best green tea" from the grocery, for the old lady's use — "how do you like her?"

Phoebe, in a disappointed tone: "I was in hopes she'd be real good and cosey! I could done anything for her, if she was like Bertha Wing's gran'mother — but I don't like her a bit; so, there!"

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Jackwood.

The old lady had by this time discovered a strange face through the half-open door of the adjoining room.

"Who is that crittur?" she demanded. "What's her name? What's she here for?"

"Her name is Charlotte Woods," whispered Mrs. Jackwood, closing the door. "She was travellin', an' lost her way, somehow. when father found her and brought her home."

"Fiddle-stick's eend! That's jest like you 'n' Bim'leech, now

to take in every straggler comes along! Do you know anything about her?"

Mrs. Jackwood only knew that Charlotte had proved herself honest, and "willin' to do." Besides, she appeared to have undergone so many trials and hardships, that they — the Jackwoods, not the trials and hardships — were "re'ly gittin' quite attached to her."

"Hum-drum!" ejaculated grandmother Rigglesly. "Them's your notions! Bring the crittur' out here, and le' me look at her!"

Charlotte had been found to possess a skill in ornamental needle-work; and she was now busily engaged on some nice sewing for Phœbe, which, in her ardor to do something to gratify her friends, she was unwilling to leave until finished; but, on being informed of the old lady's desire for an introduction, she put her work aside, and arose to accompany Mrs. Jackwood.

"You must be prepared to put up with her odd notions. You'll do that for my sake."

"What would I not do for your sake?" said Charlotte. "You have been so kind to me!"

"O, wal, I mean to do as I'd be done by," replied Mrs. Jackwood, with suffused features. "The best miss it sometimes; I know I do; — an' we must have charity one for another. I hope you'll have charity for her; she's got well along in years, an' there's no denyin' but she's had a many things to try her. Le' me take your work along: that'll please her."

Charlotte herself, one would have thought, must please the most fastidious of grandmothers. Mrs. Rigglesly, however, regarded her only with a scrutinizing scowl. The girl's countenance fell: a phenomenon the old lady construed at once into a demonstration of guilt. Then she asked a number of sharp, hard questions, which Charlotte could not answer without embarrassment: another indication that she was a deceitful character. Phœbe thought to give matters a pleasant turn, by calling attention to the needle-work.

"Heugh!" grunted the old lady; "that's a fine way to waste one's time! Time's money; did ye know it, child? Say! did ye krow it?" — with a disagreeable look at Charlotte.

"It is sometimes better than money, I think," replied Charlotte.

"Better 'n money?" echoed grandmother Rigglesly. You would have thought her some amazed and indignant female inquisitor, examining a fair heretic. "Better 'n money? What on 'arth d' ye mean by that?"

The timid girl shrank from making any reply; but, being pressed, she drew herself up, with a grace and dignity which delighted Phœbe, and answered, modestly, that, while she thought time should not be wasted, she deemed it too precious to be coined up, every hour and minute, into gold.

"And what would ye do with 't? Le' me look!" The old lady snatched the collar from Phœbe's hand. "O, I see!"—sarcastically. "This is very fancical! But what does the Scriptur's say 'bout vanities? You'd better 'nough on 't be to work on suthin' useful."

Charlotte had no word to offer; but, with a swelling heart and quivering lip, she took her work, and quietly withdrew.

"You may depend on 't," exclaimed the old lady, "she's a dangerous person to have round. I should a' had my suspicions on her, see her where I would. That guilty look—that guilty look!"—with a grimace. "Don't tell me 'bout that gal's honesty!"

"I think she's a perfect beauty!" cried Phœbe.

"Beauty, skin deep!" sneered grandmother Rigglesly. "Gals of her character gene'lly have 'nough o' that. But, if your mother knows what is good for *you*, miss, she'll send the crittur' away from here, mighty quick!"

"Mother *won't* send her away—I don't believe!" said Phœbe, in an under-tone.

"What's that?" demanded the old lady. "Don't handle them dishes so keerliss; you'll break 'em, next you know!—What's that you're mutterin'?"

"I'll handle the dishes just as carelessly as I please!" declared Phœbe, in the same indistinct utterance.

"You want me to train ye a little while, miss! I'd larn ye to mutter when you're spoke to!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "Phœbe!"

Phœbe, pouting: "I don't care! I'd take Charlotte's part, if all the world was ag'inst her!"

Old lady, whimpering: "Wal, wal! I expect sich treatment, an' I must put up with 't! I see I an't wanted here!" — more tears, and the Good Samaritan again; — "my own darter's darter sasses me to my face! Wal, wal! I'm an ol' woman, an' 't an't no matter!"

Mrs. Jackwood reproved Phœbe severely; and the girl herself, touched with compunctions, declared that she did not intend to hurt anybody's feelings, and asked to be forgiven. This was a triumph, upon the strength of which the old lady and the Good Samaritan enjoyed a most confidential and tearful season, until Mr. Jackwood and Bim entered with the baggage, and the family sat down to supper.

At the table, Mrs. Rigglesty manifested a healthful resentment of insults, by refusing to accept any food at the hands of the unforgiven Phœbe, and waiting, with an injured expression, to be served by either Mr. Jackwood or Betsy. To add still further to the general comfort, she significantly hitched her chair away from Charlotte's, and gathered up the skirts of her bombazine with virtuous care, as if to avoid all contact or compromise with so questionable a person.

It was the first time Charlotte had been present at an unsocial meal in Mr. Jackwood's house. Her heart was full; she could not eat for already she saw that her evil genius — if such things are — had reappeared, after a brief respite, in the form of a grim old grandmother, who would not rest until she was once more driven forth into the shelterless and stormy wastes of life.

"What a queer dream I had!" said Phœbe, as she awoke, on the following morning. "I thought gran'mother was an elephant, with a long stocking over her nose for a trunk, and Bim rode into meeting on her back! Was n't it funny?"

Charlotte smiled wearily.

"Why, what's the matter? How pale you look! Are you sick?"

"No," replied Charlotte; "but I have not slept well."

"It's all owing to granny—I don't care if I do call her granny!" exclaimed Phoebe. "But you need n't let her worry you a bit. What if she did say she was going to stay here all summer? I'll fix it so 'st she won't want to stop a week. I'll do everything I can to plague her!"

"No, no, Phoebe," answered Charlotte. "Be kind to her,—and I will endeavor to be patient,—and perhaps all will be well."

Even while she spoke, that vague presentiment of coming trouble, which had gathered like a cloud over her heart, darkened more and more, and she could see no light beyond.

They had grandmother Rigglesly again for breakfast.

"O dear!" sighed the old lady, declining into the rocking-chair, "I don't think I shall burden anybody much longer! Them that's so anxious to git red o' me 'll have their wish soon enough, at this rate. Jest look at my tongue, Betsy; did ye ever see sich a tongue, in all your life? I had a dreadful nightmare, last night. Did n't anybody hear me groan? Wal, it's a blessin' to sleep sound, 'specially when an ol' person like me, that an't o' no arthly 'count to nobody, is in distress. 'T would n't be wuth while to disturb young folks, though it might save my life jest to pull my little finger, when I have them horrid nightmares. Wal, it is to be expected 't every smooth-spoken crittur 't comes along,"—turning her back to Charlotte,— "will have attention paid 'em, while a poor ol' body, that's slaved the life out of her for her children, — wal, no matter!"

Observing that her complaints had produced their legitimate effect, in making all around her unhappy, Mrs. Rigglesly found it necessary to send to the spare bed-room for the Good Samaritan, whom she had left rolled up under her pillow. That ancient comforter being brought, she communed with him over her plate, until everybody's appetite appeared reduced to the same low condition with her own. Rallying a little at this, she made a feeble attempt upon the breakfast, but declared that even the tea had a disagreeable taste.

"O, wal, I may as well give up eatin' entirely. Folks don't

have sich hulsome victuals, now-days, as they use' to. Every thing turns my stomach."

As she sat back in her chair, sighing, and stirring her tea with a desolate expression, Phoebe left the table, and stood pouting at the kitchen door.

"I can't have that air blowin' on to me!" cried Mrs. Rigglesty. "My shawl is off my shoulders, too! I'm all over aches, a' ready, from the sole o' my head to the crown o' my foot! Sich a pain all through the back o' my neck as I woke up with this mornin'! nobody can never know nothin' 't all 'bout it! I can twist my head *so*," — she turned it towards her right shoulder, — "but," — turning it in the same way towards her left, — "I can't twist it *so*, for the life o' me. An' every time I move it I have to scream right out, as if you 'd cut me with a knife! Ou!"

Thereupon Bim laughed till he choked, and rushed headlong from the table, with the milk he had been drinking running out of his nose.

Thus a change comes over Mr. Jackwood's house.

Charlotte is not the only sufferer, though the greatest. From the elder Jackwood down to the hopeful Bim, all are subject to the sway of the despotic grandmother. With the Good Samaritan for her prime minister, she reigns supreme, — her knitting-work her sceptre, the rocking-chair her throne. Phoebe dares but whisper sedition, while not even Bim has courage openly to rebel.

Grandmother Rigglesty has early declared her intention to revolutionize things a little. The first article in her code is — work. She cannot endure aught that savors of idleness. Even the senior Jackwood she spurs to a more rigid economy of time. The long noonings he so much enjoys fill her with amazement and distress. So much precious time wasted! such carelessness of worldly gain! 't would be enough, she says, to try the patience of Job. She cannot, it is true, order Mr. Jackwood to go about his business in so many words; but she can whip the father over the convenient shoulders of the son. So, after dinner Bim — to use his own expression — "has to take it."

"Sonny," calls grandmother Rigglesty from her throne.

"What?" snarls Bim, who hates to be called sonny.

"W-h-a-t? Is that the way to answer? You han't had *me* to larn ye manners, or ye would n't speak so! WHAT! — Come here, an' you'll know what!"

Bim, who is engaged in putting together the frame of a small wagon, under the stoop, kicks off one of the wheels vindictively, and comes forward, with fiery looks, to learn his sentence.

Old lady, coaxingly: "Don't ye want to hold this yarn for me to wind? — that's a good boy!"

Abimelech, scowling fiercely: "I knowed there'd be suthin' for me to do!"

"Wal, you be an abused child, I must say for 't! You wan't born to work, was ye?"

"No, by darn, I wan't! And I an't goin' to work every minute o' the time, if I haf to run away!"

"Does your father hear that?"

Mr. Jackwood, tipped back in his chair by the door, enjoying a comfortable smoke, perceives that he is expected to interfere.

"Bim'lech!" — in a warning tone, — "don't le' me hear no more o' that!"

Old lady: "It does a great deal o' good to correct a child that way! A child o' mine would n't a' got off so easy!"

Mr. Jackwood, with a transparent frown: "Be a good boy, now, or I shall take ye in hand."

The old lady, sneezing, adjusts the yarn to the boy's hand.

Abimelech, submitting with a bad grace: "Wind fast, any way!"

Old lady: "You need n't be so uppish 'bout it! 'T won't hurt ye to hold yarn a little while."

"Father takes a noonin', and why can't I?"

"If he does, I don't! I never think of sich a thing. I never brought up my childern to sich lazy habits, nuther." — Mr. Jackwood winces. — "Han't your father nothin' in the world for you to do?"

"I should think so! There an't a boy nowheres round here has to tug it so hard as I do. I'm gittin' round-shouldered a'ready."

"What'll ye be when you've done as much work as I have? — There! you've held the yarn, an' it han't quite killed ye arter all the fuss! Don't go to putterin' with that waggin now! You'd better go 'n' finish the fence you was to work on this forenoon."

Abimelech, drawing Rover's tail through the centre of a wagon-wheel: "I can't do nothin' to the fence without father."

Old lady, losing patience: "Do see that boy! I wish the dog 'u'd bite him! — I should think your father — How I do detest shif'lissness! Go 'n' split some wood!"

Abimelech, grumbling: "The axe's out in the lot, an' I an't goin' to split wood for a noonin' for nobody!"

Old lady, exasperated: "O, dear! was ever so ugly a young-one!"

Mr. Jackwood, sitting uneasily in his chair: "Bim'lech! what ye 'bout?"

Abimelech, sharply: "Nothin'!"

Phoebe: "He's trying to make an axletree of Rover's tail; — that's all. Tie a knot in it, Bim, then the wheel won't come off."

Old lady: "Do hold yer tongue, an' tend to them dishes ' Sich childern! If I was in yer mother's place, I'd cuff yer ears, both on ye! Now, what's the matter with *you*, I'd like to know!" — to Charlotte. "If yer mind was in yer work, as it ought to be, you would n't set there drawin' long breaths! I wish I could have my way in this family! Things 'u'd go a little different, I guess!"

Mr. Jackwood, knocking the ashes out of his pipe: "Come, Bim'lech, are ye ready?"

Bim, furiously: "What?"

Mr. Jackwood: "It's time to go to work. I guess we'll take some fire out in the lot, an' see if that 'ere stump'll burn this arternoon."

Abimelech: "That's jest the way! Con—*demn* it all!" — ash-ing the wagon against the cheese-press. "There! I've brol it! and I'm glad on 't. I can't have a minute to myself!"

Such scenes are of daily occurrence. The old lady displays a

rare ingenuity in discovering occasions for the exercise of her reformatory spirit. The sink-pump is so noisy that it "jumps right through her bones," when any one goes to it for water. The pig-pen is too far from the house, the stables too near. The stove-oven is the "wust thing" to bake short-cake in ever invented. Then, there are those "plaguy turkeys and chickens," dodging into the kitchen a hundred times a day! A still greater annoyance is the dog Rover. Him she neglects no opportunity to cuff or kick. When he is lying quietly under the stove, she puncheth him with the broom-handle, she pincheth him with the tongs. And when all these subjects of complaint are exhausted for the day, she falls back upon her lame shoulder, pities herself to tears, and has recourse to the Good Samaritan.

By some subtle logic of her own, not demonstrable to common minds, the old lady connects all these afflicting circumstances with Charlotte, as their centre and source. "Things would go very different, if 't want for that upstart!" says grandmother Rigglesly. Whatever the evil complained of, — the poultry, the pump, the dog, or the laziness of Bim and the elder Jackwood, — her suspicious glances single out Charlotte as somehow guilty and responsible. Even her rheumatism, of twenty years' standing, seems mysteriously related to the same sinister cause.

This treatment is insufferable. It leaves Charlotte no moment of peace. She feels impelled to leave her kind friends, to whom she perceives that her presence brings only discomfort and distress. But Phoebe clings to her with all the vehemence of a girlish attachment; and Mr. and Mrs. Jackwood, out of the sympathy of their hearts, afford her what consolation and encouragement they can.

Thus a week goes by; when one day there comes a crisis. Under pretence of making a critical investigation of Betsy's cheeses, the old lady muffles herself in her shawl, ascends the chamber stairs with painful steps, and, having taken care to divert suspicion from her real purpose by sneezing loudly five or six times, and rattling the empty boards on the shelves, in the cheese-room, glides softly and stealthily into the girls' bed-chamber.

Grandmother Rigglesly is possessed of an inquiring turn of

mind. She taketh delight in all those little discoveries and surprises incidental to rummaging other people's boxes and drawers and it is this praiseworthy interest in her neighbors' affairs that attracts her eager fingers to Phoebe's letter-box, then to the bureau and closet. With what vivid enjoyment she scrutinizes every garment, trinket, and silly school-girl note! But, like all earthly pleasures, this of ransacking is transient and unsatisfactory. Arrived at the furthest obscure corner of the clothes-room, she is ready to weep like Alexander when he had no more worlds to conquer. She turns, and in the dark hits her head against the low roof. Incensed, she peers around, as if to see what audacious rafter inflicted the knock. Ha! what's this? Something carefully folded and put away over the beam. She drags it out; she holds it up to the light; she turns it over, and around, and inside out.

"Sakes alive!" grumbles grandmother Rigglesty, "what's here? An ol' merino, sure's I live! Betsy never had sich a gown!" Turning it again. "It can't be Phoebe's." Still another turn. "It"—the old lady's features contract—"it's that crittur's!"

With renewed curiosity, sharpened by malice, she searches for pockets; and, finding one, explores it eagerly.

"What on 'arth!"—drawing forth her hand. A small package is brought to the light, and she makes haste to undo it.—"An ol' woman's cap!" splutters grandmother Rigglesty; "gray hair!"—still greater astonishment,— "and spectacles!— Marcy on me! It all comes to me as clear as day! cap, spectacles, an' all!"

Without pausing to reflect that she is about to expose her own dishonest intermeddling, down stairs she hurries, and, bursting into the kitchen, displays her trophies.

Mrs. Jackwood, taking a custard-pie from the oven, drops it upon the nearest chair, and regards her mother with amazement. The latter, in her excitement, has placed the spectacles on her own nose, where they tremble with the agitation which shakes her unstrung nerves.

"W-w-w-where is that hussy?"—brandishing the cap and

wig. "Now, Betsy, I guess you 'll believe what I say! Did n't I t-t-t-tell ye!"

"What 's the matter?" cries Mrs. Jackwood.

Charlotte sits dreamily plying her needle by the window, when, aroused by the sudden burst of the storm, she looks up, and perceives at a glance what has occurred. The color leaves her cheek, but, without a word, she bows her head over her work, and waits patiently for the commotion to pass.

"Matter!" echoes grandmother Rigglesly. "Look at this 'ere gown!"

"I 've seen it before," observed Mrs. Jackwood, — "han't I? Why, it 's Charlotte's."

"I seen it 'fore you ever did!" cries grandmother Rigglesly. "A stragglin' woman stopped to Jacob's, down to Sawney Hook; an' she wore this very same gown, an' spectacles, an' false hair, I can take my oath! I was sick a-bed, or she would n't a' got off as she did. I knowed she was an impostor, the minute I set eyes on her; but Jacob would n't hear to 't; an' now it all turns out jest as I said. 'T was this crittur! Look up, here; how green ye look!" — as if the phenomenon were Charlotte's fault, and not that of the colored glasses. "What ye got to say for yerself, hey?"

Slowly Charlotte raises her head, and puts back her dark hair from her face. All pale, and cold, and self-subdued, with a thrilling beauty in her aspect, she fixes her eyes upon the angry dame.

"I can make no explanations," — she speaks gently, but there is a quick quiver of passion in her lip, — "only to those who have trusted me," tears rush to her eyes as she turns to Phœbe and her mother, "I would say this, from a true and grateful heart — that I have not willingly deceived; but it is my misfortunes that have brought me here, and made me what I am."

Phœbe, vehemently: "I believe you; I believe every word you say!" throwing her arms about Charlotte's neck. "And I wish folks would let you alone, and mind their own business!"

Mrs. Jackwood, agitated: "Phœbe! Phœbe!"

Grandmother Rigglesly: "You — you — you sassy thing!"

Phœbe: "I don't care! I 'll stand up for Charlotte with my

last breath. I only wish some folks who treat her so, and pretend to be Christians, were half as good as she is ! ”

The old lady infuriate ; Mrs. Jackwood, fluttering, tries to make peace ; while Charlotte, touched by Phœbe’s devotion, clasps her in her arms, and weeps upon her shoulder.

The arrival of Mr. Jackwood, with Bim and the dog, is opportune. He is just in time to support the old lady, who totters backward in a fit, the moment she perceives somebody near to catch her. The fit is generally supposed to be feigned. At all events, either from habit or otherwise, that remarkable woman finds it in her way to bestow a kick upon Rover, who, forgetting his usual precaution, in the general excitement, approaches his enemy just as the elder Abimelech eases her down upon a chair.

Younger Abimelech, through his teeth : “ Bite her, Rove ! ”

Rover, holding up one foot : “ Ki-yi ! ki-yi ! ”

Mrs. Jackwood, running for the camphor, and stumbling over the dog : “ Git out ! I never ! ”

Grandmother Rigglesty, starting up wildly : “ What am I set-in’ on ? Marcy sakes ! if ’t an’t that bilin’ custard ! ”

Mr. Jackwood, astounded : “ If that don’t beat all ! ”

Mrs. Jackwood : “ Strange you could n’t see that pie, father ! ”

The old lady totters towards the bed-room, dripping custard by the way.

Mrs. Jackwood : “ Don’t se’ down, mother ! I’ll bring a towel.”

Bim, doubling up with mirth : “ Goodie, goodie ! ” — possibly alluding to the pie.

Mr. Jackwood folds his hands behind him, and regards the consequences of the disaster with a look of consternation. Rover licks the spatters of custard from the floor and chair, and, timidly approaching the mass which was a pie, — now a crushed and smoking ruin, — snuffs and dodges as it burns his nose. Bim sprawls upon the floor, screaming with excessive laughter.

Phœbe, excited : “ I’m glad of it ! She might let, Charlotte alone ! ”

Mr. Jackwood : “ Don’t speak so ! ”

Phœbe : “ I don’t care, she’s no business to ! If she had n’t been meddling with what did n’t belong to her, she would n’t have

found Charlotte's dress. What right has she got in our closet, I'd like to know?"

"Never mind," says Mr. Jackwood, approaching Charlotte; "I'll make it all right; I'll stand by ye!"

"Good Mr. Jackwood! But I have brought you trouble enough already. Let me go now; — I cannot stay here any longer."

Mr. Jackwood, remonstrating, is interrupted by a knock at the front door. Rover growls. Bim runs to admit the visitor. Phoebe bustles about to destroy all traces of the custard catastrophe. Charlotte dries her eyes. Enter Mr. Dunbury.

Mr. Jackwood, cordially: "Good-arternoon, neighbor. Take a cheer. Git out, dog!"

Rover, leaping good-naturedly upon the proud Englishman's trousers, prints them with custard.

Phoebe, flurried: "Put him out doors, Bim!" — meaning Rover, not Mr. Dunbury. "He's had his feet in the pie."

Mr. Dunbury, very red: "Don't mind; no damage done."

His eyes rest upon Charlotte, bending over her work. Phoebe, who likes to introduce people, introduces her friend. The Englishman regards the fair stranger with surprise. Something in her face or manner commands his respect. He rises politely, yet not without some embarrassment at meeting one of her appearance so unexpectedly, and, resuming his seat, instinctively places his hat over a hole in his left knee.

At this juncture, grandmother Rigglesty, curious to learn who has come, enters and stands with her back towards the stove. Recognizing an old acquaintance, she says "How de do?" with an air of resentment, designed to impress him with the fact that she possesses a memory of wrongs.

Mrs. Jackwood, anxious to divert attention from the old lady: "How is Mrs. Dunbury to-day?"

Mr. Dunbury: "She's very low, again. She will be better soon, however, I hope, for we expect Hector —"

Phoebe, with a start and a blush: "Hector! Is he coming home?"

Mr. Dunbury: "He has written that he will be here to-night.

I called in," — turning to Mr. Jackwood, — "to see if I could borrow your wagon to bring him down from the village."

Mr. Jackwood: "Sartin, neighbor Dunbury; anything I've got, you're welcome to."

Charlotte, suffering greatly, and feeling ill at ease in the Englishman's presence, escapes to her chamber, followed by Phœbe.

"Only think, Charlotte!" cries the young girl, animated, "Hector Dunbury is coming to-night! He will go right by here. We'll be on the look-out, and see him."

Charlotte, tenderly: "I would like to see your hero; — yet," — with a sad intonation, — "he is nothing to me. Nobody is anything to me now, but you, Phœbe. And you, dear Phœbe! — I must leave you soon!"

Phœbe, with a frightened air: "What do you mean? You an't going!"

"Yes, dear child, I shall go! You must not oppose me, now!"

Phœbe, frantically, at the head of the stairs: "Mother! mother! — You shan't, you shan't stir out of this house to-night! We won't let you!"

"Phœbe, dear Phœbe!"

Mrs. Jackwood, appearing presently, finds the two locked in a close embrace.

"Mother, she says she is going! Shall she? Tell father! — He won't let her, I know."

Mrs. Jackwood offers sober counsel to dissuade Charlotte from her purpose. Meanwhile, the excited Phœbe runs out, alarms the elder Abimelech, and brings him to the chamber.

For once in his life, Mr. Jackwood's quiet spirit is roused. He declares that, before he will see Charlotte leave his roof, he will give the old lady her "walking-ticket," and ship her off to Sawney Hook by the morning stage, without any remorse whatever.

"We've had enough of her pesky notions!" cries Mr. Abimelech Jackwood; and puts his foot down.

Charlotte is more and more distressed. No, no! he must not do that, she insists; and, to pacify her friends, she promises to reconsider her resolution, and remain with them until morning.

But reflection only confirms her in the thought that it is her duty to go. Let what will betide, she cannot, — she, who has no claim upon her too kind friends, — she cannot be the cause of sending away from her own daughter's house even so unworthy and unwelcome a guest as grandmother Rigglesty.

No, she herself must go, — and quietly, too, to make the pain of parting all her own. Accordingly, after passing a sleepless night, she rises in the still of the morning, dresses herself by the moonlight that lies so calmly in the chamber, imprints a kiss on Phoebe's lips, and drops a tear upon her cheek, without awaking her, and goes forth noiselessly from the house. She wears the garments given her by her friends, carrying her own in a small bundle ; and, thus equipped to battle with the world, she sets out upon her journey amid a silence so solemn that there is something strange and awful in the sound of her own light tread upon the soft dust of the road.

VII.

THE DUNBURYS.

A FAINT whisper, and the feeble fluttering of a white hand on the pillow, called Bertha Wing to the bedside of her friend.

"I thought I heard a wagon, — there, is not that my son's voice?"

Miss Wing had heard nothing; and the invalid sunk at once into despondency. At her request, — and mayhap to relieve her own anxious feelings, — Bertha resorted to the porch, and listened under the vines. Hearing no sound of wheels, she walked out beneath the trees, and looked up the road. Still no Hector.

It was now dusk. The evening was calm and clear. Over the western range of mountains the star of Love burned with a pale flame in the silvery sky, while in the east the yellow moon, half-risen, shone like a wide, luminous tent pitched behind the hills.

Bertha saw the star, and the moon, and the shadows in the valley all around, and the fair vault of over-arching blue; and she gazed on all this beauty, until, no longer able to control her woman's heart, which had been disciplined to suffer and be still through long years, she leaned her forehead against one of the maples by the fence, and wept.

But she hastened to check her tears. She looked up and smiled, and said, "I will be strong!" At that instant, beneath the heaped-up foliage that towered above her, a bat flitted in zig-zag course athwart the gloom. It startled her, for she was looking for some fair omen whence to gather hope; and her eyes followed it with a sort of fascination, when, as it disappeared in the dusk, she beheld, in the direction of its angular flight, the figure of a man.

Her first impulse was to escape ; but, on reaching the porch she turned again, and met the visitor at the gate. It was Mr. Rukely, the minister. He greeted her with marked tenderness of manner, and inquired for Mrs. Dunbury.

"Nothing but the hope of seeing Hector seems to sustain her," answered Bertha, with a slight tremor in her tone.

"Is Hector coming?" asked the visitor, surprised.

"Yes ; he wrote that he would be here to-night," — Miss Wing dropped her eyes. "I think it will be well for his mother ; she pines for him, as if he were her life."

Mr. Rukely looked troubled ; but she invited him to go in, and, passing under the porch, with her hand in his, the cloud cleared from his brow ; — yet could he not perceive that she shrank from him instinctively ; that while her understanding and her will were the two open arms that welcomed him, there was something deeper and stronger in her nature, that repelled him ?

Bertha took shame to herself that it was so. She sat by and heard him talk to her invalid friend, and each noble word that fell from his lips dropped like fire upon her rebellious heart. When he went away, she accompanied him to the porch, and pressed his hand with strange earnestness at parting.

"Forgive me ! forgive me !" she said, in deep humility.

"Forgive?" repeated Mr. Rukely, with a benevolent smile
"For what?"

Bertha: "Why is it that I could never appreciate you? Surely, surely, if I loved only the good and the true, my natural heart would never have rebelled, when reason said, 'Love!'"

Mr. Rukely, with hopeful interest: "Does it rebel now?"

Bertha, very faintly: "No, not now."

But Bertha could not look up, to return his cordial "good-night;" and when she raised her eyes, he had passed the gate. Then again, as before, the ominous bat flitted athwart the gloom, and disappeared, flapping around the minister's black hat.

Bertha returned to the bedside of her friend, and buried her face in the pillows.

"What is it, my poor girl?" asked Mrs. Dunbury. "Let me know all your grief."

Bertha sobbed. — “Has God forsaken me? Can He withhold His light and strength from one whose only prayer is to serve Him aright? I sometimes think so; else why, in all my struggles —”

She checked herself. She had spoken wildly; she was afraid she had blasphemed. Unwilling to impose her burdens on her friend, she arose, and endeavored to forget her sorrows in offices of charity.

Mrs. Dunbury had been sustained by an interest in the girl's sufferings; but now, when the conversation turned upon her own condition, she sank at once. Hector would not come; all hope of recovering was past; and she assured Miss Wing, with pathetic earnestness, that she had but a few minutes to live.

Bertha was not much alarmed; yet, pencil in hand, she sat down, with a serious face, to receive the mother's dying words to her son.

Mrs. Dunbury was an English woman, of strong natural intelligence and fine sensibilities, ripened by culture in early life; and misfortune and ill-health had not so far impaired her intellect, but her dying message evinced all the richness and grace of expression of her happiest days. Unfortunately, it was never completed. Not that her spirit departed, but that Hector arrived.

Bertha Wing dropped her pencil, and stood up, pale, and trembling in every nerve, as if she had seen an apparition; while Mrs. Dunbury, who had just composed herself to die comfortably, started up in bed, and cried out with joy. How different that cry from the late dying whisper!

“Well, mother, you are glad to see the prodigal!” said Hector, in a voice full of tenderness and cheer, when she had clung spasmodically to his neck for some seconds. “Ah, Bertha! is that you?”

Bertha's conscious face became suddenly very red, and there was a slight trill of agitation in her voice, as she returned the greeting.

“If mother would let go my hand, I would kiss you, Bertha! But, upon my word, I can't get away! — How strong you are, mother! Sick? — I don't believe it! Your pulse — as good a

pulse as anybody's! Your eye — I wish mine was half as bright. All you need is a little stimulus."

Mrs. Dunbury, shaking her head: "O, but I have tried tonics faithfully!"

Hector snapped his fingers: "So much for your tonics! This is what I mean," — pressing her hand to his heart, — "sympathy, sympathy! Confess to me that this is what you have wanted."

"I know it is — I know it! You make me a different being! Dear boy! how my heart has yearned for you! You are my only hope and stay! Your father — your father!" — the invalid's voice faltered, — "he needs you, too, my son. Promise me now — this night — that you will not leave us again."

At mention of his father, Hector's head sank upon his breast; but, recovering himself, he looked up, pressing the invalid's hand.

"O, I shall not leave you in a hurry, mother! I am glad to feel once more the peaceful influences of my old home. The woods, and streams, and mountains, and all the haunts of this most beautiful and tranquil of green valleys, will inspire me; and it seems as though I could spend years of happy quiet beneath this dear old roof: but the good Divinity that shapes our ends leads me by such unexpected paths, and flings open before me so many golden gates of surprise, that I dare make no definite plans for the future. I can promise nothing."

Hector turned his fine eyes up with a look of aspiration, which thrilled his mother. At that moment, the shrill old clock rang in the adjoining room. Hector started.

"The same venerable time-piece, my boy! How many hours I have counted by that clock, in your absence, when every stroke has rolled an almost insupportable burden on my soul! — But I must not forget my drops. Bertha ran into the other room: will you speak to her?"

"Perhaps I can administer to you myself. Where are your drops?" — Hector turned to the vials and cups on the table. — "Merciful — mother! what's all this?"

"Those are my medicines. I have been obliged to resort to quite a variety."

Hector looked horrified: "Medicines! variety! death and destruction!"

"You frighten me, Hector. Don't, my son! Why do you look so strangely?"

"Because I am exceeding wroth! O, what a native power you must have, to admit so many deadly enemies into the citadel of your constitution, and hold out against them all! Look you, dear mother,—I aspire to be your medical adviser for a few days. Will you accept me?"

Such was Mrs. Dunbury's confidence in Hector, that she acceded at once to his proposal.

"And you engage to follow my directions?"

"Willingly,—for I am sure my wise and generous son can do no wrong."

At that moment, there was a crash.

Hector, with a queer expression: "Cannot, eh? Look there!"

"Why, what have you done?"

"Nothing,—only upset the table a little."

"And the vials?"

"Are smashed, mother! I'll tell you how it happened. I thought I would give you a tune in place of a powder; and, seeing the flute on the book-case, I reached up—the table was in the way—I placed my knee gently and adroitly on the leaf, and—the result!"

Hector's good-nature was irresistible.

"He was careful to put the lamp on the mantel-piece!" said his mother to the dismayed Bertha. "So, we won't weep over the catastrophe. Call Bridget; she will clear away the ruins."

Bridget, getting on her knees: "It's ahl on the ile-cloth, Mrs. Dunbury. It did n't go a speck on the carpet."

Hector, going: "I see the table is waiting, out there; and I have the appetite of a lion! The stage broke down under the mountain, we were delayed three hours in a supperless wilderness, and I've been the ill-tempered man you see me ever since. Nothing but toast and tea will cure me. Come, Bertha."

After supper, Mrs. Dunbury called Miss Wing to her side, and astonished her.

"I believe," said she, "I will sit up a little while, and have my bed made."

Bertha, doubting her senses : " Sit up ! "

Hector, advancing : " Why not ? "

Bertha : " She has not sat in a chair for five days ! "

Hector, dogmatically : " Can't help it ! Let her sit up half an hour. "

And she, who was so lately engaged in dictating dying messages, was straightway assisted to a chair.

Meantime Hector, retiring to the sitting-room, and seating himself at his mother's seraphine, near the open door, played " Sweet Home " with exquisite tenderness of expression.

Bertha ran to him in haste : " She is crying ! I am afraid " — in a hurried whisper — " the music will weaken and depress her. "

Hector, striking up a plaintive Scotch air : " Have you no confidence in the new physician ? Look you, Bertha ! if our patient asks for medicine, tell her Dr. Hector has not prescribed any. And if you know of any drugs, fluid, herb, or powder, — allopathic, homœopathic, botanic, — harbored or concealed in this house, gather them up with affectionate care, and place them on the table convenient for being tipped over. Some accidents can happen as well as others ! "

With Hector's eyes upon her, with his lips so near her face, a strange trouble held poor Bertha as by a spell.

" I am afraid," she answered, mechanically, " that your treatment will kill her. "

" Then let us take care that she dies a happy death ! "

Hector struck into an inspiring melody, full of laughter and tears, which ran somehow into the grand movement of a spirited march. He had not ended when, at a cry of alarm from Bertha, he looked up, and saw his mother, dressed all in white, approaching, with uplifted hand, like a somnambule. Nothing disconcerted, he fixed his eyes upon her bright, dilating orbs, and poured all the fire and energy of his soul into the concluding strains.

The invalid's hand sank slowly, a smile flitted over her pale face, and she tottered forward. Hector caught her in his arms.

A few minutes later, Bertha Wing, in the bed-chamber, heard a well-known touch : it was not Hector's : yet she could scarce

credit her senses, until she looked, and, behold! the invalid playing with all the grace and softness of her better days!

"Here, Bertha!" cried the joyous Hector, when his mother had finished; "you may take our patient now, and put her to bed."

Late that night, when all was still in the house, Hector left his chamber, and went forth into the open air. The full moon was shining through the door-yard trees. In her calm light the dusky mountain slept, like a monster, with vast head and lofty shoulder traced upon the back-ground of the sky. The valley was still and cool. Willow clumps and shaggy elm-trees, dimly seen, marked the winding course of the creek. Towards this he wandered away in the silent night.

But the old path, by which he used to stray, was overgrown. And the sloping turf beneath the butternut-tree, whereon he used to lie in the hot midsummer noons, and listen to the purling water and the humming bees, — the dear old turf was gone; the freshet floods had lapped it away; and in its place appeared an abrupt bank, covered with high grass.

The water that night sang the same old tune, but with a sadder, deeper meaning than of yore. Hector wept as he listened; for in that plaintive ripple what voices spoke to him out of the past!

Rousing himself from these dreams, he was returning to his chamber, when, as he approached the porch, he heard a fluttering among the leaves, and saw a figure start up from the bench.

"Don't be afraid, Bertha; it is I."

"How you frightened me! I thought you asleep and dreaming, by this time."

"I have been dreaming, but not asleep, Bertha. O, dreams dreams! what would life be without them?"

"It would be better and happier," said Miss Wing.

"That was spoken with a sigh, Bertha. Your dreams have been false, then, and you regret them?"

"I do not regret them, for they have taught me useful lessons. But I am awake now, and shall dream no more."

"Shake off this illusion of existence, then, for all who live are dreamers. Come, Bertha, sit down, and tell me your heart's his-

tory. Ah, how your hand trembles! Are you afraid of me?"

Bertha, confusedly: "Yes, I am."

"Once there was a flower, and it was afraid of the rain. Do you dislike me? I think you did not in old times, — did you?"

"O, no! But you have been so long away —"

"I have become as a stranger! But it should not be so. I have always cherished a tender remembrance of you. When I was a boy, you recollect, I fancied myself in love with little Bertha Wing. People laughed at me, because you were older than I! Well, that is all past; and I have outgrown I don't know how many loves since! I'm a fickle wretch, Bertha! — How you shiver! Are you cold?"

Bertha, in a strange tone: "The air is chill. Let me go in."

Hector, kindly: "Go in, good Bertha. But give me that kiss you owe me. My mother held me, you know, and I could not claim the right of an old friend. — What! so shy?"

Bertha, escaping: "Another time. Not now, — don't, Hector!"

He loosed his hold, and the next moment stood alone under the porch.

"I declare," thought he, as he bit his lip, — perhaps it itched a little, — "that girl is in love! Some rogue has been trifling with her. Poor Bertha!"

Hector sighed; retired to his room; went to bed; remained as broad awake as an owl for three mortal hours; then, lapsing lightly into oblivion, slept till the crowing of the cock. Unable to close his eyes again, he turned his face to the window, and lay watching the brightening of the east through a notch in the mountains. First a few gray streaks; then a ruddy glow; and at last up came the sun, like a great fiery spider, on his web of beams.

Up got Hector, also, pulled on his clothes, and, stepping out upon the balcony over the porch, inflated his lungs in the fresh morning air. Then he went down stairs, and, learning from Bertha that his mother was awake, hastened to her chamber. He found her shedding tears.

"What now?" he cried. "I just met Bertha, with a pair of red eyes, in the hall."

"She thinks her services are no longer required here, and she is going away. I am better, she says, — and you are here now to comfort me —"

"But this is absurd! Ho, Bertha Wing! Come here, you trembling culprit! Do you think you are going to leave us so?"

Bertha: "I should be glad to stay, — but — it will be better —"

She hesitated, blushed, and dropped her eyes before Hector's piercing look. Yet she was firm. Neither his persuasive eloquence nor Mrs. Dunbury's tears could move her.

It was a sudden and unaccountable resolution on her part. Ah, nobody knew what pain, what prayers and tears, it had cost her! Had Hector guessed her secret, would he have opposed her?

After breakfast, Bertha, looking unusually pale, but with a small hectic spot on either cheek, quietly withdrew, put her things carefully together, and took leave of her friends.

"Who would have thought so quiet a body as you could have such an iron will?" cried Hector.

"When my duty is clear," said Bertha, — "but even then I am too easily influenced."

"By those who can command you, — not by me, at all! — Well, good-by, mother! Expect me back in an hour or two, and Bertha with me. I shall learn if she is wanted at home; and, if it's as I suppose, we'll only take a pleasant ride up the hill, and return to dinner."

Bertha's home was high up on the mountain side. It was a beautiful drive up there, that bright summer morning. A little beyond Wild River, the mountain road branched out from the highway, crossed the valley, and wound its snake-like course up the steep terraces and slopes of the western hills. The day was warm; the sunshine painted road and field; and often, toiling up the difficult ascent, the young man stopped his panting horse in some quiet dell, to let him breathe under the cool shade of roadside trees.

The glory of the morning, and the beauty of the scenery, inspired Hector; a full joy flowed out of his soul, rippling and sparkling in words, and bathing his fine face.

Bertha all the while held strongly upon the reins of her will ; she made herself outwardly cold and stony ; but, in spite of all, a sweet intoxication stole over her. She was glad when the pain of separation came, and Hector helped her down at her father's house.

It was a small wooden house, with a garden on the lower side, an orchard in the rear, with fields beyond, and the thick billowy foliage of green woods further up the mountain. A little gate opened upon a little path which led through a neat little yard to the door. Bertha and her friend were half-way in the enclosure, when an old lady came out to greet them.

"Why, Bertha, is that you?" she cried, shading her eyes with her fore-arm. "And if there an't Hector Dunbury! Who ever expected to see you! Did you jest rain down?"

"I just reined up," replied Hector, shaking hands with the delighted old lady.

Bertha led the way to her grandmother's room, — a small, comfortable apartment, plainly furnished, with a bed on one side. Perceiving some one on the bed, she looked inquiringly at the old lady.

"Don't speak loud," said the latter; "'t would be a pity to wake her, — she seemed so tired and troubled, when she laid down!"

"Who is it?"

"A poor gal, that 'pears to be travellin' a-foot an' alone, poor thing! She was goin' over the mountain, an' stopped for a drink o' water; but she looked so pitiful, 't I went right to work an' made her a cup o' tea, an' some toast, an' gin her my bed to lay down on an' rest her, arter she'd e't a mouthful. Poor thing! She dropped asleep, jest like a child. She must a' had a hard ja'nt this mornin'!"

Hector sat down in the door, and broached the subject of Bertha's return; Bertha, meanwhile, laying off her bonnet and shawl with an air of gentle firmness, which sufficiently expressed her intention to remain where she was.

"I tell ye what," said the old lady, "I'm dre'ful lonesome, days, when she's away, — Susan an't so good as a pair o' tongs for comp'ny, — an' I guess you can git one o' Sam Fosdick's dar-

ters ; there 's three on 'em to hum now, doin' nothin'. 'T any rate, you drive up on the hill ; an' if they an't willin' to go, n'ary one on 'em, pr'aps Bertha will. We 'll talk it over an' see, time you come along back."

This was certainly a fair proposition ; and Hector, jumping into the buggy, drove up to the dilapidated old house where Sam Fosdick's daughters lived. He found them all at home, — three tall, strong girls, yawning away the morning over a little work. They were slovenly dressed, not expecting company ; and his sudden appearance created a decided sensation. Without much ceremony he made known his errand.

"I don' know," whined Mrs. Fosdick, a shrivelled, sour-faced, discontented woman, who sat picking over a dish of wormy peas, in the corner. "We an't so poor 't our gals are obleeged to go out to work ; but it 's jest as they can agree. What do you say, 'Livia ?"

Olivia, with a toss of her frizzled head : "I don't think I should be able to go. 'Patra can, if she 's a mind to."

Cleopatra, hiding her naked feet under her chair : "I 've no disposition, thank you, Miss Olivia ! 'Tildy may, if she likes."

Matilda, simpering : "I have n't 'tended two terms at Kiltney jest to learn that housework is my sphere !"

Hector, retreating : "Certainly not ! You will pardon my presumption. Bridget does the housework, and the most mother wants is a companion —"

Olivia, condescending : "O, if that is the case —"

Cleopatra, interrupting her : "You an't going to change your mind, I hope, jest as I 've concluded to go."

Matilda : "You both refused once ; and now, if anybody goes, I think it ought to be me, — had n't it, ma ?"

Mrs. Fosdick : "'Tildy is very accomplished, and if it 's a companion your mother wants —"

Matilda, unpinning her curl-papers : "'T won't take me ten minutes to git ready ! Why can't you help me, 'Patra ?"

Cleopatra, independently, with several toes peeping from under her dress : "I 'm nobody's waiter, I 'd have you know, miss !"

Matilda : "I don't care, 'Livia will !"

Olivia, mockingly : " I don't care, 'Livia won't ! "

Hector, with exemplary self-denial : " Excuse me, Miss Matilda, but I am really afraid you are making too great a sacrifice of feeling, and I am unwilling to remove you out of your sphere. "

He took leave politely. 'Tilda looked blank, 'Patra chuckled, 'Livia tossed her frizzled head again ; and during the remainder of the forenoon, the three poor-and-proud sisters quarrelled sharply about the nice little apple of discord which had been dropped among them, and snatched away again before either could seize it.

Diverted by the adventure, Hector returned to the other house. He was met by old Mrs. Wing at the gate.

" I did n't much think you 'd git one on 'em, " said she, " for they are pesky proud critturs, always for everlastin' settin' up for ladies ! "

" Whose horse is that under the shed ? " asked Hector.

" It 's Mr. Rukely's ; he called at your father's, jest arter you left, and follered right along up the hill. "

" Mr. Rukely, " — Hector scratched his ear, — " Mr. Rukely, Mr. Rukely ! — Are he and Bertha pretty good friends ? "

" Dear me ! " whispered the old lady, all smiles ; " did n't you know it ? They 're engaged. They 're in the parlor now. "

" Phew-ew ! " whistled Hector. " But who is that in your room ? "

" It 's the gal 't you seen lyin' on the bed. An' I was goin' to tell ye, if your mother wants a nice, perty body to wait on her, she can't do better, I think, than to take her. She turns out to be a gal that 's ben livin' to Mr. Jackwood's. "

" I wonder if she 's the person father saw there last evening ! " exclaimed Hector.

He paused at the door, struck with sudden surprise. Notwithstanding his father's favorable report of Charlotte, he was altogether unprepared to see so peculiar and striking a countenance. The subdued passion and spiritual beauty of her face told her heart's history. The intuitive Hector felt a strange influence steal over him ; and all her sorrows, the depth, the sweetness of her spirit, seemed revealed to him.

On her part, she did not venture to return his earnest gaze.

But something in the tones of his voice startled her. It seemed to reöpen suddenly, at her very feet, the dizzy gulf from which she had fled. She stole an anxious glance at his face; and instantly the blood rushed suffocatingly upon her heart, the room grew misty, and her head sank upon the bed near which she sat.

"You are so tired, poor child!" cried Mrs. Wing. "Le' me give you a little currant wine."

She brought a bottle from her closet, poured a few spoonfuls of the liquid into a tumbler, and supported Charlotte's head while she drank.

"You are very kind!" said the girl. "I am better now, — thank you."

Hector, with instinctive delicacy of feeling, had walked to the open door, and now stood with folded arms, gazing out upon the fair mountain scenery. This was a relief to Charlotte; she made a strong effort to control herself, and appear calm; yet when he turned again, her spirit was all weak and tremulous, like a reed bending under the weight of a bird.

Hector, however, betrayed no sign of recognition. Hoping, but trembling still, Charlotte breathed an inward prayer that the old lady's proposal in her favor might be at once rejected. Hector was but too eager to accept it. Then she endeavored, falteringly, to excuse herself; but he would not consent to release her, and she saw no way left but to accompany him.

Meanwhile, in the parlor, the conscientious Bertha confessed herself, in deep contrition of heart, to her indulgent friend.

Mr. Rukely was somewhat disturbed. But he was none of your wild and capricious lovers. His passion lay tamely at the feet of his understanding, like an obedient spaniel, that never snapped or snarled. He pressed Bertha in his arms, and for the first time in his life, affianced though they were, kissed her — on the forehead.

A cold revulsion of feeling made the unhappy girl shudder in his embrace. O, how wicked she thought herself, because her heart was stronger than her will! But down she crushed that heart again, resolved anew to love what her judgment pronounced worthy.

"It is a great relief," she said, "to have told you this; and you are so kind! I thought it would separate us forever!"

"No, Bertha," repeated the other, "it makes me love you the more. I respect your truth. You have fled from temptation; you have shut your eyes and your ears against it; it is the only way."

"The worst is passed," she said. "I conquered my love for him once; why it returned upon me with such power, I cannot tell; but I have shut it out again, and forever."

She walked mechanically to the window. Hector was helping Charlotte into the buggy. He seemed to hold her hand with a lingering pressure; his features beamed with satisfaction; he looked the very picture of manly grace. A quick, sharp pain shot through Bertha's heart as she gazed, and she turned away, stifling a cry of anguish, and shutting out the sight with her hands.

VIII.

DOWN THE MOUNTAIN.

THE morning continued fine. The rays of the sun beat down hotly ; but cool breezes played upon the mountain side, shaking the green foliage of the woods, dancing over the meadows, and tossing the fields of grain into fantastic waves.

A prospect of Alpine loveliness opened before Hector and Charlotte, as they emerged from a shady dingle not far from Mr. Wing's house. The road wound along the brow of a lofty spur, from which the valley, out-spread below, looked like a vast and magnificent map. The miniature fences, the spotted farms, the slender and winding streams, the houses so distant and so small, formed a picture of exceeding beauty. Still and grand rose the woody mountains beyond, the forests on their backs appearing like thick growths of weeds a mower might cut with his scythe. Here and there, amid clearings, along a dark chasm in the hills, gleamed the foam and silver of Wild River, rushing to the plain.

Hector pointed out to his companion his father's house, Mr. Jackwood's, and two or three little villages nestled in green spots up and down the creek. But, somehow, he could not talk to her as he had talked to Bertha. He could neither be frivolous nor sentimental. Something in her character seemed to demand a tone of remark which a gentleman (Hector considered himself one) could not, consistently with the views of society, freely address to a stranger in her position. Thus conscious of awkwardness, he contented himself with a few commonplace observations, and remained silent.

Charlotte, on her part, feared to speak, lest her voice should betray what he had failed to discover in her face ; and she feared

to look towards him, lest something in her expression, not before revealed, should give form and substance to any vague shadow of recognition that might be flitting through his mind. Thus she was chiding and torturing herself for having consented to accompany him, when a catastrophe occurred, which in a moment swept away every barrier of restraint that divided them.

Mr. Dunbury kept a farm-boy, named Cornelius Boughton. His familiar appellation was Corny. He was seventeen years of age, and was distinguished for a meditative disposition, and a stoical indifference to the ordinary cares of life; qualities which, it must be confessed, superficial observers were apt, indiscriminately, to term obtuseness and stupidity. Well, Corny had that morning harnessed the horse for Hector, and placed him before the buggy. He had also discovered that the spring which secured the eye of one of the traces in its hook was loose, and might drop off. It did not, however, occur to him that a few seasonable strokes of the hammer might be of service in preventing the dislocation of necks; nor did he mention the circumstance to Hector.

Hector, accordingly, knew nothing of the danger, until, as he was driving down a gentle slope, he heard something rattle on the ground. It was the shafts, which had slid out of their stays, and fallen down, in consequence of the unhooking of that fatal trace. The horse jumped; one trace still held; the buggy was brought violently against his gambrels; a kick — a spring — and in an instant of time the frightened brute was making wild, irregular leaps down the declivity.

Hector prided himself on his management of horses. Never, with the reins in his own hands, had he met with an accident. He did not lose his presence of mind; yet clear-headed, resolute, vigilant as he was, he could devise no way of averting a catastrophe. If he held hard on the reins, he but drew the vehicle more closely upon the horse's heels; and to attempt to drive into the fence with the shafts on the ground, would have been certain destruction. He might, at the outset, have jumped out, and, by the exercise of superior agility, stopped both horse and wagon; but Charlotte clung to his arm, and held him fast.

Hector had no fear for himself. His only care was for his

companion. But for the tight clasp on his arm, he would have known nothing of the terror that froze at her heart. She did not scream, nor speak one word, from first to last; and when, in a clear, firm voice, he told her what to do, it seemed the only way, and the right way, and she obeyed at once.

The feat was difficult and dangerous. Hector could not assist her; it required all his skill to manage the horse, and keep the shafts in the track. Not until he had given her ample time to save herself, did he venture to look around. She had climbed over the seat, and dropped down behind; and he had a momentary glimpse of her lying upon her face in the road, quite still, as she had fallen.

All this happened in scarce more than a minute's time from the dropping of the shafts. Hector was now travelling at a speed that could not last long. He approached a curve in the road, and the track, which had offered little impediment to the shafts thus far, grew rough and stony. The buggy began to bound and reel; and, expecting momentarily to go over, he prepared to throw the reins clear of everything, and fall in as compact a shape as possible, when the crisis arrived. Suddenly, looking before, to calculate his ground, he saw a man, scarce five rods distant, driving lazily up the mountain. He seemed asleep; his head was sunk upon his breast, the reins hung loosely in his hands. Hector rose up, bareheaded, his hair flying, and shouted the alarm. To the man, who started bewildered from his nap, and saw swift ruin dashing down upon him in such a form, he looked more like a fiend than anything human. The poor fellow was horror-struck. It was too late for him to clear the track, but, with the instinct of terror, he screamed and shook the reins wildly up and down, and finally threw his hat, to turn aside the danger. The frantic animal sheered to the bank; the shafts struck, and flew to splinters; and the buggy, hurled into the air, doubled together like paste-board, and came down with a crash, a mass of fragments, throwing up dirt and turf into the very face of the spectator.

The horse had cleared himself at a spring; but the driver lay among the ruins. How still everything was! The man sat shivering in his wagon, and gazing with dumb amazement at the

wreck, when he saw something move. Over went the broken seat, and up got Hector from under it.

He was a frightful-looking object, covered from head to foot with dirt, his hair all over his face, and one sleeve of his coat rent away from the shoulder. At first he looked vacantly around, knowing not at all where he was or what had happened; but presently, spitting out a mouthful of earth, and putting his hair from his eyes, he stared at the heap which had been a buggy, and began to remember.

"My—everlasting!" said the ghastly countryman, without stirring from his wagon, "I never thought o' seein' you git up ag'in. I vow!"

"I'm not hurt!" cried Hector, still a little wild. "Where is *she*?"—meaning Charlotte.

"She's over the crick, by this time! Lightning! how she sprung!—She jest grazed my wheels! Lucky you smashed up jest as you did, or you'd a' tore me to flinders. What a narrer 'scape I had!"

Hector hastened up the road to find Charlotte. The man sat a few minutes longer in the wagon, contemplating the catastrophe and his own "narrer 'scape," when the unaccountable whim took him to get out. He walked around the wreck; touched it with his foot; lifted a cushion with his shaking hand; dropped it; drew a long breath, and said, "My jingoes!" with a depth of expression which seemed to afford him great relief.

Stunned by the fall, Charlotte lay for some seconds in the road; then got upon her feet and began to walk very fast up the hill, in pursuit of Hector's hat. Reflecting, suddenly, however, that she ought rather to look after the head it belonged to, she turned, and, now fully awake, ran, in great trepidation, to learn what had become of Hector. She met him coming up the road.

"You are hurt!" she cried out, at sight of him.

"Not a bit!" Hector declared, stoutly. "I fell like a football, and up again at a bound!"

"But your face is covered with blood!"

"Indeed? I've been wiping my mouth for something—I did n't know what!"

Charlotte stanchd the blood with her handkerchief.

"You're a brave girl! I feared you were hurt! It is worth a kingdom to see you on your feet again! There, that will do, — thank you!"

"Your lip is cut!"

"That's nothing! If you are safe, it's all I care for. I tell you," said Hector, "after running such a rig, it's rather exhilarating to think there's no damage done which money and a little salve won't repair!"

"Where is your buggy?"

"It lies just below here, around those bushes. It looks like an Irishman's shanty run into by a locomotive."

"And the horse?"

"Gone down the mountain! Poor fellow! I hope he won't kill himself! But see, the people in that house are staring at us. How some people will stare, and keep at a safe distance, when others are in trouble! These are priests and Levites, with a spice of curiosity added to their composition. Let's make Good Samaritans of them, against their will, and levy contributions of brushes, water, and towels."

Hector misjudged the people in question, and afterwards asked their forgiveness in his heart. They were poor women, very much frightened, but willing enough to do, when they knew what to do. Hector washed himself, combed his hair, and brushed his clothes, while one of them pinned up his sleeve, and prepared a plaster for his lip. Then, leaving Charlotte in their care, he returned to the wreck.

"I swanny!" said the countryman, rubbing his hands, "I never see anything chawed up like that 'ere buggy! Both exes, springs, firs, box, seat — everything smashed! The wheels, I guess, are sound, and that's all."

"And our necks," suggested Hector.

"Did n't I have a narrer 'scape? I can't help thinkin' on 't." And the man walked about the wreck again, chuckling nervously, and looking very pale.

"Is n't your name Crumlett?"

"That's my name — ya-a-s!" — Mr. Crumlett stared. —

"Wal! I did n't know ye before! You begin to look like, washed up! How d'e dew? When d' ye come to town?"

Answering these questions briefly, Hector proposed to Mr. Crumlett to carry him home.

"I declare," said that individual, regretfully, "I don't see how I can, any way in the world! I'm in a desprit hurry!"

"O," replied Hector with a quiet smile, "you are in a hurry? But I should expect, of course, to pay you for your trouble."

Mr. Crumlett, on reflection: "Wal, I d' know — an old acquaintance, so — p'r'aps I might."

Accordingly Mr. Crumlett took on board the buggy-cushions, with a few other fragments of the wreck; assisted his "old acquaintance" to make a compact heap of the remainder on the road-side; and, finally, with Hector and Charlotte as passengers, turned his horses' heads down the mountain.

Mr. Crumlett, as it proved, not only had time to carry them to their destination, but to drive tediously slow, at that. Gloating over the accident, and chuckling repeatedly at his own "narrer 'scape," he seemed entirely to have forgotten that he was in a hurry. Occasionally, at Hector's instigation, he flourished his whip, and clucked a little to his horses; but those grave animals were not to be urged out of their comfortable pace by any such gentle means. Meanwhile, anxious to learn the fate of his own horse, Hector inquired for him on the way. He had been seen by several persons, who described him as going very fast, with the reins streaming from his back, and "one tug whipping his side to make him go faster." But presently there came a pedler, who had passed by Mr. Dunbury's house.

"I have n't seen any horse running," said the itinerant tradesman; "but I saw a woman unharnessing a horse, in a yard, back here."

Hector's spirits rose. The woman was Bridget, and the horse was the runaway.

"Blessed pedler," said he in his heart, "go thy way, and be happy. — Drive on, friend Crumlett!"

Mr. Crumlett cracked his whip and clucked again, but to little purpose. In the course of time, however, the party came

in sight of Mr. Dunbury's house. Bridget stood in the road, her broad, red face turned with an expression of wonder towards Mr. Crumlett's establishment. Hector swung his hat.

"It's him!" screamed Bridget, dancing and clapping her hands,—"Mrs. Dunbury! it's him, with a good head yit to wear a hat on!"

Then straightway out ran Mrs. Dunbury, her face white and wild, hair dishevelled, cape falling from her shoulders, and threw herself upon Hector's neck, as he jumped from the wagon. A few stifled words, a few choking sobs and tears, and, her excited strength relaxing, she sank fainting in his arms.

With Charlotte's ready assistance Hector bore her into the house. Presently her eyes opened languidly, and her grateful look wandered from Hector to his companion.

Danger, like death, is a leveller. It brings king and beggar upon the same human ground. From the moment of peril, when Hector felt Charlotte's womanly clasp upon his arm, they had ceased to be strangers; and, still glowing with the generous heat with which her sympathy inspired him, he introduced her to his mother. The latter extended her feeble hand, with a smile of welcome. A tender chord was touched in Charlotte's breast, and she knelt humble and happy at the invalid's feet.

"God bless you, my child!" said Mrs. Dunbury, fervently.

Hector inquired for his father.

"I blowed the harn fur 'im," cried Bridget, "but he did n't coom yet! It's over the creek I'll go an' cahl 'im!"

She ran out, and met Mr. Dunbury in the yard, who presently entered, with Corny at his heels. He was an excitable and impetuous man, and the girl had told him just enough of the catastrophe to make him fume. Hector hastened to explain.

"I might told ye how 't would be!" said Corny, notching a stick with his knife.

Mr. Dunbury, gruffly: "What do you mean?"

Corny, drawling his words: "Wal, the spring was loose that held the tug in—and I know'd 't would be all the time unhookin' if ye did n't look out."

Mr. Dunbury: "Did you know no better than to leave such a trap for breaking people's necks?"

Corny, phlegmatic: "'T wan't my trap! You told me to harness Jerry to the buggy."

Hector: "Why did n't you tell me the spring was loose?"

Corny: "'Cause I did n't think on 't, I s'pose."

Bridget: "That 's jist one o' Carny's tricks! He'd know nothin' at ahl, if 't wan't knocked out of 'im." — Punching him with the broom. "Out o' the house wid yer whittlin's, noo!"

Corny, pugnaciously: "Come, stop!"

Mr. Dunbury: "What are you here for? Why don't you go and take care of that horse?"

Corny: "You did n't tell me to!"

Mr. Dunbury, recognizing Charlotte, uttered a sort of half apology, and welcomed her with high good-breeding. But a consciousness of being somewhat carelessly dressed appeared to trouble him just at this time, and, the moment her attention was withdrawn, he took occasion to pull up his limp dickey, and smooth down his rumpled shirt under the worn lapels of his faded plush waistcoat.

"Where are you going?" asked the invalid, clinging to Hector's hand.

"I am reminded that I have left our friend Crumlett waiting, — and he is in a terrific hurry!"

"But you must not let him go till after dinner. How kind it was in him to bring you down!"

Hector found Mr. Crumlett sitting patiently in his wagon, whipping the gate-post.

"How much do I owe you for your trouble, sir?"

"Wal, I d'n' know, — guess fifty cents 'll be 'bout right, — won't it, hey?"

Hector paid him, and asked if he would stop to dinner.

"Wal, — it's unexpected, naow," replied Mr. Crumlett, pocketing the change, — "like enough I will! You can give my team a bite, I s'pose?"

"Put your horses in the barn, and cut as much grass for them as you choose," said Hector. "There's the barn; there's the

grass ; and there 's the scythe, hanging in the apple-tree. You have plenty of time : Bridget's dinner will be ready in half an hour."

"Wal, I don't munda waitin' — only git the team a chawin' on to suthin'! Guess I 'll back 'em round a little, and feed 'em here in the shade, — may as well."

Mr. Crumlett accordingly staid to dinner ; ate prodigiously ; told all about the way that buggy went to pieces ; recurred some twenty times to his own "narrer 'scape ;" and, on going away, asked permission to throw that "little han'ful o' grass" into his wagon, — having cut considerably more than his team had had time to eat. The permission granted, he set out, well satisfied with his fortunes generally, and his dinner in particular, and drove leisurely up the mountain, rehearsing to himself a new and more startling version of his adventures, designed to astonish his friends at home.

IX.

HECTOR AND CHARLOTTE.

THE light of a new morning has dawned upon Charlotte's life. The past lies behind her like a night of troubled dreams. A few clouds of doubt and fear still chase each other across her sky; but the thick darkness is gone, and the young day is fresh and calm, and full of promise.

Not only has the catastrophe of the buggy served to throw open at once a wide door of sympathy between her and her new friends, but it furnishes a fruitful and exhilarating theme for familiar discussion. Hector makes epigrams upon a certain leaden-hued contusion under Charlotte's eye; upon his own lameness, and the cut in his lip; and upon other pleasing results of the disaster. Then, to enliven a dull company of evening visitors, who have called in honor of his return to Huntersford, he announces that he will deliver an entertaining and instructive lecture on the subject, accompanied with music by his mother, and illustrated by original pen-and-ink sketches. The lecture proves a capital burlesque, and elicits tremendous applause. The eloquence of the speaker is equalled only by the originality of the diagrams. The first of these represents "Corny whittling;" received with roars of laughter. Next, "Corny brings Jerry to the door." Then, various stages of the catastrophe are portrayed, until "Mr. Crumlett" is introduced to the audience. At this point, Mr. Dunbury, who has preserved his gravity all along, forgets his dignity, and shakes with democratic fun. Mrs. Dunbury joins in the general merriment, — more quietly than any of the rest; but her pride in Hector makes her very happy. Charlotte's soft eyes glisten; and

Phœbe Jackwood, throwing herself upon her friend's shoulder in a paroxysm of mirth, declares that she "*shall* die!"

Hector limps three weeks with his bruises; and Charlotte carries the dark-colored mark under her eye for nearly the same length of time. They condole with each other, and laugh at each other, until one would judge them to be friends of years' standing.

The invalid's health gradually improves. Hector is a good physician, Charlotte a capital companion and nurse. But, notwithstanding all their care, Mrs. Dunbury's mind frequently relapses into despondency, and she believes death inevitable, unless the discarded doctor is recalled.

It is scarcely possible for her to abandon the stimulus of drugs. She would be true to her promise, and abide by Hector's treatment; but daily, by mere infirmity of will, she finds herself transgressing his commandments. She carries magnesia in her pocket, and eats it by stealth. She chews rhubarb-root, and calls it sweet-flag. She swallows pills in her apple-sauce. She entertains salts and a teaspoon in a drawer, concealed beneath numerous strata of folded apparel, and indulges in furtive doses of the same, ever and anon.

Hector perceived something of this, and, going to his mother, by the very force of his simple and earnest dealing, compelled a confession. One by one she abandoned all her hidden drugs to his mercy, reserving only a modest lump of rhubarb, and a couple of favorite pills.

"But what can I do?" she cried.

"When you think medicine absolutely required, call on me."

That morning she ate the last of the rhubarb; the next, she swallowed one of the pills, and in the afternoon sent the other to keep that company; and, on the third day, in great extremity, she had recourse to Hector.

Hector cruelly ordered a pitcher of warm water; and, from that time, emetics of that simple nature were the sole consolation he would afford her, when she hungered and thirsted after drugs. But nothing could be more effective than this treatment; she recovered her appetite, and soon her greatest anxiety was to have

something delicate and nice for dinner. This, indeed, became, for a time, the chief care and study of her life.

"Fie, mother!" cried Hector, one fine morning, at the breakfast-table, — "these trifles are unworthy of us. We are too much like a celebrated old woman —

'Victuals and drink were her chief diet,
And yet the old woman could never be quiet.'

For my part, I believe we should live upon something besides victuals and drink, notwithstanding so venerable an example."

"Hunger," said Mr. Dunbury, "knows no philosophy."

"Nor is genuine hunger troubled about many things. It receives its daily bread, and is thankful. In this artificial life, we have no conception what simple and humble fare is all-sufficient to the natural man. What if I should tell you I know a family that eats worms?"

Mrs. Dunbury, with a beseeching look: "Don't, I pray — at the breakfast-table, Hector!"

Corny, grinning over his muffin: "A family 't eats worms!"

Charlotte: "I think I know the same family."

Mrs. Dunbury: "Not in this region — not among civilized people!"

Hector, gravely: "Our nearest neighbors, mother. In faith, it is a family of young robins in the tree before my window. You should see them once! It really looks quite human — the beautiful care the old ones take of their young. The best of us might learn a lesson of them. The love, and joy, and gratitude, they manifest, seem to say, much more plainly than our hollow words, — especially when our faithless lives belie them, — 'Give us each day our daily bread.'"

Mrs. Dunbury: "Do you ever hear of young birds repaying the care of their parents, by feeding them, in return, when they become too old and infirm to feed themselves?"

"That's a simple duty, mother, which I think no well-bred and affectionate robins would shrink from performing."

"Will you be so good, then, as to imagine some pretty example of the kind, and, drawing your lesson from it, go down the meadow,

this morning, and catch the famous pickerel your father saw in the river, yesterday? I would like fish for dinner."

"I don't know, mother. The last time I went a-fishing, I hooked a cruel hook through the backs of little fish, and let them swim around in the water, in untold anguish, to bait their big brothers who came to eat them. In the excitement of the sport, — I believe men call it sport, — I had not one merciful thought to bestow upon the innocent little folk that had been so unfortunate as to be caught out of their native brook in my basket."

Corny, stoically: "I don't mind it's hurtin' 'em. I like to see 'em wiggle!"

Hector: "That's all very nice, without doubt; but how do you suppose you and I would feel with great iron hooks through our backs, — let down into a city of hungry lawyers, for instance, — with some big giant swinging us from the end of a long pole?"

Corny, incredulously: "They c-a-n't!"

Mrs. Dunbury: "You can catch the pickerel with a snare. That will be no greater cruelty than that practised upon the worms by the worthy family you speak of, and which you thought so pretty and commendable."

Hector: "I've no answer to make. I'm going out to show the men how to mow, this forenoon; and, if I think of it, I will catch your pickerel."

At nine o'clock, Mrs. Dunbury looked out of her window, and saw the mowers in the meadow, with Hector at their head, cutting into the tall grass with uniform strokes, and laying the swaths in even lines behind them.

"He has quite forgotten the pickerel," she said to Charlotte. "If you should go to the meadow, and carry him his fishing-pole, I am sure he would ask no better excuse to throw down that dreadful scythe."

Charlotte set out with a light heart to do the errand, — imagining herself a native-born country-girl, rustic, happy, and free from care, and singing snatches of merry songs as she went.

She crossed the rotting timbers of the bridge, and approached the mowers under cover of the willows that grew around a bend

in the stream. Birds fluttered and chattered in the bushes ; the waters rippled and gleamed, and leaped, with low, gurgling laughter, over their pebbly bed ; and the summer wind swept gently across the grass, playing among the leaves, and blowing with grateful coolness on her brow and in her hair. O, she was made for such happiness ; she felt that the good God loved her then, and that birds, and stream, and breeze, and even the soft haze that brooded over the valley, and lay in translucent purple banks all around upon the mountain heights, sympathized in the pure joy that overflowed her heart.

Charlotte trod quickly along the shaven turf, until she could see the mowers carrying back their scythes along the level swaths. Hector marched at their head, singing a negro melody. Corny brought up the rear, whittling his snath with a jackknife. Mr. Dunbury and two day-laborers formed the body of the force. Not far off was Bridget, shaking out the new-mown grass with a fork, tossing it wildly about her ears, or flinging it in great wads, here and there, over the meadow.

Arrived at the edge of the field, the men rested their scythes upon the ground, and began to whet them, having first wiped them with wisps of grass. The cheerful ring of the stone upon the metal beat a measured accompaniment to Hector's singing, — only Corny striking occasionally a little out of time. Charlotte paused involuntarily. What trouble came up out of the past, at that happy hour, to tyrannize over her spirit ? She stood hesitating in the meadow, when Hector ceased singing, and called out to her with a cheery welcome, as he threw down his scythe.

"Le' me go'n ketch the pickiril, if you do' wanten," drawled Corny.

Hector : "Would you quite as lief do that as mow ?"

Corny, earnestly : "I *druther* !"

"I have no doubt of it ; how refreshing it is to hear you speak the truth !"

And Hector coolly walked off with the fishing-pole, leaving the chagrined Corny to stare at him, with perplexed and disappointed looks, over his scythe.

"You shall go with me, Charlotte." Hector stepped to the

young girl's side, as she was returning towards the stream. "The fields are so sweet and beautiful to-day, how can you shut yourself up in the house?"

The glance of his eye and the gentle tones of his voice stirred a strange and happy emotion in her heart; and she had no power to resist the influence that drew her to his side.

"Your pickerel," said Hector, "is the very attorney of fishes. He locates his office in some eligible spot, often among the brown river-grass, at the mouth of some little brook; and I have no doubt but, if we understood the fishes' language, or rather their signs, we should be able to read over his door, 'PIKE PICKEREL, ATTORNEY AND COUNSELLOR AT LAW.' There, day after day, he awaits his clients, who, never suspecting what a scaly fellow he is, run into the very jaws of danger, and are taken in by him, before they know it. Some of the little brook-people are too cunning and quick even for his sharp practice, and escape in spite of his teeth; but generally, when he darts into a school, he seizes at least one out of it, and, to make a long tail short, finishes him at a bite. Those that run away may be called flying-fishes, while those that are taken become swallows. And so our lawyer flourishes, until his line of business is interrupted by a line of a different nature, and some avenging power, by hook or by crook, puts a stop to his proceedings with an attachment, — such as I am about to try, in the case of our neighbor under the bushes, here."

Hector entertained his companion with this sage dissertation upon the character and habits of the pickerel, as they walked along by the willows and crossed the bridge together. On the other bank of the creek, they followed the old wagon track up stream, until they arrived at the confluence of a brook that came down from the eastern hills. Here, in a quiet nook, overhung with bushes, the attorney of fishes was found. Hector's eyes sparkled, as he arranged the fatal snare.

"A royal pickerel, upon my word! Not so large as a shark, but he'll do. Look, Charlotte, how neatly and comfortably I slip the noose —"

"I see!" laughed Charlotte, as the fish deliberately took his

nose out of the wire loop, and with one stroke of his tail propelled himself into a knot of grass.

"The snare is a vulgar and inartistic contrivance!" exclaimed Hector. "But I am bound to see fins out of water, at some rate! He's a little shy, a little conservative,—quite a prosperous and cautious fish; but—there's his nose, and there swings the wire under it."

At this crisis, Charlotte could not help reminding him of what he had preached, that morning, to Corny.

"How would you like it yourself, if some superior power should make a man-snare of the north-pole and the equinoctial line—"

"Don't speak of such disagreeable things just at this time!" interrupted Hector. "In three seconds you may laugh, then we will talk about cruelty to fishes; but now;—look out for your head!"

A sudden pull,—snap went the pole,—and away darted the pickerel up stream, with the wire jerked tightly under his gills, and the line streaming after him through the water. He was out of sight in an instant; but the tip of the spruce pole, to which the line was attached, swimming on the surface, served as a buoy to mark his course.

"So much for a short line and a brittle pole!" exclaimed Hector.

"Your mother thought that line might not answer, and gave me another,—I had quite forgotten it," said Charlotte. "Here it is."

"But my snare is gone."

"I can give you a wire out of my bonnet."

The new snare was scarcely rigged, when the pickerel, having got clear of his encumbrance, reappeared in his favorite haunt, looking very impudent, as if he had returned in a spirit of litigation, to learn what it was all about. Hector, accordingly, proceeded to demonstrate the matter, by adroitly slipping a second noose over his gills.

"What an expression of countenance! It says plain as talking, 'Do that again, and I'll prosecute!' And, I presume, if he could speak, or if we understood the Finnish dialect, which

pickerels may be supposed to use, he would be laying down points of law to us."

Another pull, — and his pickerelship, leaping with a sudden splash out of the water, slipped from the snare and fell flouncing in Charlotte's lap, as she was sitting on the grass. She flung him off, with a scream; and the next moment he was threshing the shallow water in a small stone basin below, when Hector seized him, and cast him upon dry land.

"Have ye cotcht him? have ye cotcht him?" cried the excited Bridget, rushing into the bushes on the opposite bank. "Kape 'im! hould 'im! and I'll be afther wading acrost to yez!"

Nobody observed her until, taking her shoes under her arm, and carefully holding her dress, she stepped down into the water and commenced fording.

"Go back, you ridiculous creature!" cried Hector. "What are you going to do? What do you want?"

"It's the big floppin' fish I'd be havin'!" said Bridget. "An' it's br'il 'im for dinner I will."

"Come around by the bridge, then, and be respectable," said Hector. "You're a fright, Bridget! You look like a Gothic cottage!"

"An' where's the harm, sure? Nobody tould ye to be lookin'. Ye might be kapin' yer eyes to home, jist!"

"But you'll be drowned, Bridget! You are not amphibious; you're not a duck, dear; I can take my oath you're not web-footed!"

At that moment Corny's grinning red face made its appearance among the willows behind her.

"Go it," he cried; "'t an't deep!"

"Dape?" echoed Bridget. "No more it is n't! I've waded this creek a dozen o'times, an' niver a bit did I get drowned, yit!"

"But you never waded in this spot," said Hector. "There's a deep place right before you."

Bridget, doubtingly: "Miss Charlit, is it the truth he's tellin',
aoo?"

Charlotte : " Can't you see ? "

Bridget : " Faith, an' how should I be seein', wid the sun in the wather dazzlin' the eyes of me out o' me head intirely ? "

Corny, vociferously : " Water-snakes, Bridget ! "

" Och, be jabbers, where ? "

" Right behind ye, here, streakin' it arter ye like blazes ! "

Bridget, in a fluster : " It 's lyin' ye are, noo ! "

Corny : " I hope to die ! There 's one big enough to swallow ye ! He 's got teeth like a pitchfork ! "

Bridget, dropping skirts and shoes : " S'int Pathrick, hilp ! Is there a snake, Misther Hector ? "

Corny, throwing a slab of flood-wood into the creek : " There he is ! he 'll have ye by the heels in no time ! Scooter, Bridget ! " .

The panic-stricken Bridget plunged forward, — and downward, — and under. For a moment nothing of her was visible but a whirlpool of skirts and a floating sun-bonnet ; then up rose her face like a sea-nymph's, covered with weeds and hair, and dripping profusely.

Corny, yelling and clapping his hands : " Swim ! Put in ! He 's arter ye ! "

Bridget : " O, bloody murther ! " — blowing water out of her mouth, and struggling for sight and breath. " It 's drowned I 'll be ! I 'se kilt intirely ! "

Hector, extending his fish-pole : " Catch this ! "

She grasped it eagerly, and Hector drew her to the bank. After a deal of struggling and stumbling, she got up, with the heavy water pouring from her clothes, and looked around.

" Faix," said she, " who is it that 's kilt ? Quit yer laughin', wid ye, ye botherin', lyin' spalpeen of a Carny ! There 's niver such a baste as a wather-snake anywheres in the crick ; and d' ye s'pose I did n't know that ? It 's makin' belave skeert I was, ahl the time ! "

Hector : " And making believe dive, too, Bridget ! "

Bridget, indignantly : " An' is't that knocks such sights o' fun out o' yez ? D' ye think I care for a thrifle of a wet foot ? "

But you have lost your shoes ! "

"Jist as if 't was n't an ould pair 't I have cast away twice this marnin', an' picked up again out o' pity, jist! So I tha'ht I'd be afther lavin' 'em in the crick, an' that would be tae last of 'em, bad luck to 'em! Give us yer pole, an' I be fishin' up my bunnit, noo!"

Hector: "I'll get it for you."

Charlotte, with tears in her eyes: "Don't wait for it, Bridget! Run to the house! You should always exercise after a cold bath!"

Bridget: "I'd be exercisin' that Carny, if I had hould of 'im wonst! Ye'll be gettin' yer pay, one day, ol' fello'!"

Hector, raising a drenched rag on the end of his fishing-pole: "Here 's your bonnet!"

"An' is that my bunnit? Bad luck to it! it might bether 'ave glane doon strame! — Laugh, thin, ye owl of a Carny! — Where 's yer piekerel, noo?"

"Here, take him and run."

"Ouch! but he'll be afther bitin' me with that floppin' tail of his!"

"Put him in your bonnet."

"An' do ye think I'd be disgracin' an illigant arthicle, like this same, wid his slippery carkiss? Here 's the thing that'll do beautifully. Wrap 'im up in it, Misther Hector."

Corny, from over the creek: "Here! that 's my jacket!"

Having rolled the fish in the garment, — which was one of several, belonging to Corny, left lying in the fields that summer, — Bridget set out for the house, muttering to herself, and shaking her head defiantly, her wet clothes clinging and flapping, and her drenched, uncombed hair streaming down her back. Meanwhile Mr. Dunbury was calling, impatiently, to Corny. Hector asked the latter if he heard.

"Wal, I s'pose I do," said that indifferent youth, seating himself under the willows.

"Why don't you answer, then?"

"'Cos'; I s'pose I did n't think on 't. I was lookin' at *her*."

Mr. Dunbury called again at the top of his lungs.

"W-a-a-a-l!" bellowed Corny, "I'm comin'!" and, taking out his knife, he began to whittle a dry stick.

Hector, severely : " Is that what you mean by *coming* ? "

Corny : " What's the thunderin' hurry, I'd like tō know ? Time enough ! Say, why don't ye go up to Jackwood's bridge, an' ketch some o' them suckers ? I see a hull'slew o' lunkin' big fellers, up there, t' other day."

Mr. Dunbury was calling again ; and, with extreme reluctance, young Master Boughton got up from the bushes, put his knife out of sight, and returned, lazily, to his work.

" Come, Charlotte," said Hector, " let us get away from the hearing of this. It makes my soul sick. — Let us stroll up the creek, and see about Corny's suckers. Will you come ? "

The fields lay fragrant and fair before her ; and to go out there, alone with him, into the beauty and calm of the valley, seemed an almost intoxicating happiness. Charlotte hesitated ; but he said " Come ! " again, so winningly and kindly, that she could not refuse.

" You must be responsible to your mother for taking me away."

" Yes, yes," returned Hector, with a strange fervor in his tones, " I'll be responsible, I'll be anything for the sake of your company."

" My company ? " repeated Charlotte, doubtingly.

Hector turned upon her a look so radiant and tender that it thrilled her through and through.

" Aside from my mother," said he, " you are the only person I see in whose society I take any satisfaction ; and you know it."

" I know," — Charlotte's heart fluttered, — " I know that you are often dissatisfied and lonely. Your mother has observed it, and it troubles her."

" O, my mother does not understand me ! And you do not, Charlotte."

" I know I do not : that is not for me."

" Not for you, Charlotte ? "

" No, — I feel so like a little child beside you, always ! I am glad when you are happy ; I am sorry when you are sad ; and that is all : I never think of understanding you."

" My heart craves to be understood, Charlotte ; and you might understand it, if you would ! "

"I?" cried Charlotte, startled.

"You, better than any one. I could throw open all doors to you, but you will not even look into the inner chambers."

"It is because I have no right!"

Charlotte's voice was low and tremulous. Hector looked at her inquiringly, then, walking near her side, took her hand; but she withdrew it gently.

"Who and what are you?" he cried out, impulsively.

"A child — to you."

"But children do not do so: children do not keep us at arm's length: children are trusting and simple."

"I cease to be a child when you would make me more than that to you."

"And why not more?"

"I am not worthy."

"Not worthy!" Hector seized her hand again, and held it clasped in his, in spite of her. "Not worthy! O, Charlotte, do I not know your heart?"

"But you do not know my past!"

"That has been dark, I know. Although you have never told me of it, I see something of what you have suffered. But think of my past, Charlotte! 'Tis I who am not worthy! O, the rank weeds of passion I have trampled through! They lie rotting behind me now, and memory is the wind that brings their pestilent exhalations to my nostrils. It is this which makes me sick of life."

"It is that which is purifying your life: I have seen so much."

"Perhaps, — for remorse is very busy, ploughing over those weeds."

"And perhaps the soil of your nature will be all the richer for them," added Charlotte, timidly.

"If they are ever subdued," said Hector. "You have spoken wise words, and they comfort me — a little. I try to believe that my experience has been necessary and useful; but since I have known you, I have seen myself so soiled and stained, that I have thought there was not rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash me clean."

"If you had not aspirations above other men, you would not be dissatisfied with yourself," replied Charlotte.

"Your mantle of charity is broad, and very grateful to the back of my offences! But why do I talk to you in this way? to you, who, above all, I am anxious should think well of me! Is it not because I want you to know me, — my weakness as well as my strength, my dark side no less than my bright side, — in order that I may have your sympathy?"

"Remember — reflect," said Charlotte, troubled, — "I am but your servant."

"Servant! I hate the word! It sounds too much like slave! There is no servitude to the soul but ignorance and passion; and the soul in you is all I have to deal with. Had I found you in the meanest capacity, in absolute bondage even, it would have made no shade of difference; still something in your soul would have spoken to something in mine, — would have called me brother, and I would have recognized my sister!"

Hector spoke with a vehemence that appeared to alarm his companion. Her cheek paled, and her hand quivered with agitation.

"So let me have no more of that!" he went on, smiling gently. "We will put our feet upon the false partition between us. You understand me, — I have no thought of falling in love with you; that is as far from my heart as Jupiter from the sun."

Charlotte laughed a sad and tearful laugh, and said there was no need of telling her that.

"Of course not; you are a girl of sense. It is because I can put this confidence in you, and know that you will not misinterpret me, that I esteem you — that I choose you for a friend."

"But you have so many old friends here, — friends so much worthier than I!"

"I have not one such, Charlotte. I cherish but a shrivelled respect for the best of them, — that you know."

"And I know that they complain of you for that. They were once your intimates; but now you are indifferent to them. And it is you who have changed, they say, — they never change."

"True: I have changed, I do change, I hope always to change

And it is because they never change, that the grass has grown between our paths. There is Charles Hart, for instance: he was the companion of my boyhood; there was sympathy and confidence between us; and, in all my journeyings, I never forgot him. On coming home, I anticipated scarce a greater pleasure than that of meeting him. We would measure experiences, compare philosophies, and learn so much of each other, I thought. Well, I saw him. He was a withered bough; he bore no fruit for me. His talk was of oxen. He delighted in reminiscences of good horse-trades. He told all about Jim Weston's fat hogs. Great stories he recounted of riding fractious colts, of breaking stubborn steers, of running tilt against pugnacious rams. Conversation agreeable enough in its way, but unsatisfactory on the whole. In principles and truths that were the life of my spirit, he confessed a total lack of interest. I spoke of my poetical studies—he had had things of greater importance to attend to. I advanced ideas on spiritual culture—he thought them dangerous: he had done up his faith in the shroud of his creed. folded his arms, and was waiting for a resurrection. When I wished to lead his mind towards the miracles of life and growth, he branched out on the subject of onions, and told what beds of 'em '*me and father*' raised, last year. He is but a sample of the rest. I am not sorry that they find me changed."

"But the young ladies," said Charlotte; "they are not like the men."

"I hold not a very plump opinion of them, either. Some of them are pretty and intelligent, I allow. I find real piety and goodness in a few. But see how they have been educated! I do not complain of what they have not learned, so much as of what they have learned amiss. Conventionality and expediency are their two hands. The principal use of their ears seems to be to catch the answer to the important question '*What will the world say?*' But the worst of all is, they have been taught by their wise mothers to subordinate all their motives and aspirations to a low matrimonial ambition. This is, in fact, the nose they follow, — with one eye on convenience, the other on respectability. They are so sharp in this practice, that it is dangerous for an

unmarried man to approach them. I have known brave exceptions, but the rule applies pretty generally. What wonder, then, that I neglect them for you? It is refreshing to find one sensible girl, who has no thought of being fallen in love with!"

"That would be insane in me, indeed!" said Charlotte, smiling, but with a strange emotion in her face.

"And yet," cried Hector, "the idea is not so absurd as you imagine! But do not fear! My days of fancy are passed. Had I seen you no longer ago than when I was in the south, there might have been danger; but there is none now."

Charlotte drew a long breath. Her countenance was downcast and troubled.

"That offends you, I see! It should not. Come, look up, — smile."

Charlotte raised her eyes. They were filled with tears.

"How have I grieved you?"

"You have not — it was nothing you said —"

"And yet," insisted Hector, "I touched some chord that suffering has made sensitive. How you distrust me!"

"I do not distrust you," said Charlotte.

"If you did not, you would tell me of your sufferings. You would lift that dark curtain which hides your heart."

They had stopped; they were standing by a little runnel in the meadow. Hector held her wrist and looked down earnestly in her face. For a moment she struggled with herself; then spoke out, hurriedly.

"Hector, you have been true to me, and I cannot deceive you. Let me tell you this, then, once for all. If you knew my history, you would put me from you. It is the consciousness of this that shoots me through with pain, when I remember myself — you — and the gulf between us!"

Hector became pale with apprehension.

"Show me that gulf," he said, with an incredulous smile.

"No, — no, — I have warned you of the truth, — the fact I can never speak."

Hector's brow was overcast; but, seeing how strangely sad and fair she looked, with her large eyes drooping under his searching

gaze, he placed his finger, playfully, under her chin, and met her upward glance with a generous smile.

"Pardon me," he said, in a low, musical tone. "I'll try not to ask again for what does not belong to me. Forget it all; and we will see now what can be done for Corny's suckers,—for here we are, close by the bridge, and the squirrels on the fence are chattering at us."

But Hector's heart was no longer in his sport. There were no fish at the bridge worth catching, he said.

"Then let us go home," Charlotte proposed.

He could not think of that; the charm of leading her through those sweet solitudes was too pleasant to be broken.

"Do not be faint-hearted," said he. "If we go a little further we can pass by Mr. Jackwood's house, and, perhaps, get a glimpse of Phoebe's bright face, on our way home."

And Charlotte still had power to do only what he asked, and follow where he led.

X.

MRS. RIGGLESTY'S ADVENTURE.

THE grandmother of the Jackwood family, like the greatest great-grandmother of us all, was tempted by an apple. It came floating down Huntersford Creek, and was discerned by the modern Eve, as she walked upon the shore, filling her apron — not a fig-leaf — with floodwood fagots for the kitchen fire.

"A good nice June-eatin', true as I live!" said grandmother Rigglesty, sneezing at the sun in the water. "It's a pity to have it wasted." She looked about for a long stick. "I never see! Time an' ag'in 't I've stumbled over sticks in this 'ere shif'liss pastur', now I can't, for the life o' me, lay my hand on one!"

The best she could find was a heavy, crooked branch, which proved to be some less than an inch too short.

"It's jest the way alluz!" she burst forth, getting up from her bent posture. "Everything is so hateful! I've broke my back, and wet my foot, into the bargain! Sich an awk'ard stick!"

All this time the apple, tossing in the bright waves by the shore, was progressing still further from her own mouth, towards the mouth of the creek. She followed, until, her eye resting upon Mr. Jackwood's old flat-bottomed boat, she hastened to get aboard, deposited her apron of fagots in the stern, which lay upon the shore, and placed the dry seat for a bridge over the bilge-water that had settled in the bow. Upon this she ventured, armed with her crooked branch; paddling patiently to divert the apple towards her, until at length she was able to tickle it with the tips of her fingers. Then, after stretching and straining until she became purple in the face, she grasped it in her hand. At the

same time she dropped the stick. Recovering the stick, she dropped the apple. Then she dropped them both. Regaining the fruit, she placed it on the bow of the boat; but, not feeling at home on a bow of that description, it quietly fell off, whilst she was recapturing the stick, and danced laughingly away in the sunshine.

"Hold on! dear me!" she cried, making a desperate effort to recover it.

The attempt proved literally fruitless; and, in her vexation, she threw the stick at it spitefully. Having bespattered herself profusely, and lost both the apple and the branch, she crept back upon her bridge, with her features all knotted up in a snarl, and looked around for her apron of fagots. To her dismay, she found them afloat in the bilge-water, rushing back into the stern. The boat was unfastened, and, her operations serving to work it off the shore, she now saw herself sailing slowly and smoothly out into the stream.

"Whoa! whoa!" cried grandmother Rigglesty, as if the boat had been a horse or an ox; "whoa, you sir! — Bim'lech! Betsy! My sakes! can't nobody hear?"

Somebody did hear. It was the dog Rover, who came capering along the bank, yelping furiously.

"Here, Rover!" she cried, — "that's a good doggie! Help me, quick!"

Perhaps, anticipating the sinking of the boat, she looked for salvation in his bark. But the dog took quite an erroneous view of the case, regarding the call as of an entirely sportive nature. Considering his gallantry challenged to assist in some wild fun projected by the picturesque old lady, he leaped into the water, and commenced a furious attack upon the boat, with teeth and paws.

"Git out!" ejaculated grandmother Rigglesty — (he had not yet got in). "You'll have me tipped over, sure 's this world!"

The more she was in earnest, the more Rover thought she was in fun, and persisted in jumping aboard in spite of her. The boat tipped frightfully, and grandmother Rigglesty screamed. Then Rover shook himself, showering her with spray as she sat perched

upon her plank; and she screamed again. Thinking it very funny, he sat down good-naturedly in the bottom, and looked up wistfully in her face, winking, and churning in the water with his tail. In her exasperation, she began to kick his chops; upon which he showed a disposition to take everything in good part, by playfully masticating her foot.

Meanwhile the boat was filling rapidly, and threatening to go down, with all her crew on board. By some good fortune, however, an island appeared, in the shape of a round boulder, in mid-channel; and as the bow struck the rock, the old lady scrambled upon it, leaving her apron and fagots to float down stream in the abandoned wreck. Rover appeared to consider this phase of the adventure as the funniest of all, and endeavored to enhance the sport by crowding her off the rock, and by growling and snapping at her toes when she refused to jump into the water.

At this pleasant juncture, a voice hailed from below; and Hector and Charlotte appeared, coming around a clump of bushes that grew upon the point of a knoll. Thereupon Rover, swimming to the bank, ran joyfully to his old acquaintance, and attempted to leap into her face, with intent to lick.

"Go away!" cried Charlotte. "I can't love you when you are so wet!"

So Rover shook himself again, and set out to rub himself dry on Hector's trousers. But, being caught up suddenly by the legs, he described in the air, first a half-circle, then a tangent, then a gentle curve, — and afterwards came up, snuffing and paddling, in mid-channel, before he appeared to understand at all the nature of the phenomenon that had surprised him.

Hector, to the old lady: "What have you got there, grandmother?"

Old lady, crossly: "I'm in a strait — that's what I've got! Don't stop to parley; but help me, if you're ever goin' to! I jest went to git an apple out o' the crick, when that hateful boat had to go off with me!"

"And did you get the apple?"

"No, I did n't! and that's what makes me so provoked!"

Hector, gravely: "It might have been expected. I once

saw a juggler take an apple out of an orange; but I never yet heard of any person taking one out of a current."

"I'm sure I don't know a word you're a talkin' about! spluttered the old lady. "I'm ketchin' my death-cold here, — both feet soppin' wet, — I'd have ye know!"

At this point, finding it difficult to restrain her emotions at sight of her old friend, Charlotte set out to make the Jackwoods a visit, leaving Hector to get the cast-away off the rock.

"The trollop!" muttered grandmother Rigglesly. "I declare, if she wan't la'fin' right to my face!"

"What do you say?" demanded Hector. "Take it back, or I'll not help you out of the creek!"

"She'd no bizniss to la'ft!"

"If she is human she could n't help it; you are a pleasing and picturesque spectacle, grandmother! But you must be better-natured; you must be kind, and patient, and charitable, my dear friend."

"I s'pose I was hasty," the old lady confessed, reluctantly. "But you need n't a' snapped me up on't so short! I did n't mean no harm!"

"That'll do pretty well for a beginning. If you keep on, you will get to have quite a Christian temper," said Hector, "by the time you are old."

The boat had gone aground upon a sand-bar near the bank, and Hector, reaching it with his fishing-pole, drew it towards him, and dragged it upon the shore.

"Cultivate patience, grandmother!" he cried; "the craft stands in need of repairs."

Having emptied the water, fagots and all, into the creek, he deliberately set about calking the boat with the old lady's apron.

"Marcy on me!" gasped grandmother Rigglesly; "I shall fly!"

"Do so," said Hector; "and you will save me this trouble. Be careful, though, when you alight; you will frighten people."

As she gave no decided indication of going up, he went on with his calking, sparing no expense of time or calico in stopping the leaks. Having accomplished his work to his satisfaction, he

launched the boat, jumped aboard with his fishing-pole, shoved out to the rock, and brought the old lady safe to land.

Strange as it may appear, she felt anything but emotions of benevolence and gratitude. Nothing could soothe her soreness of heart, and the rheumatic pains in her neck and back, like the balm of some sweet revenge. Accordingly, while Hector was picking the seams of her apron out of the seams of the boat, she commenced a similar operation upon Charlotte's character.

"She's a gal 't means well, — I can say that for her," she began, her fear of Hector preventing her from approaching the subject too openly, — "and when that's the case, I'm sure we'd oughter kinder lend a helpin' hand to anybody, no matter 'f they've ben the wust critturs 't ever lived."

Hector was interested; but, pretending indifference, he continued to pick away at the old lady's apron. She at the same time picked away at Charlotte. She told the whole history of the disguise, and of the young girl's exposure, the day before she left Mr. Jackwood's. As it was the first intelligence of the kind Hector had received, it troubled him, his mind naturally reverting to what Charlotte had that morning said of her past life. Mrs. Rigglesly perceived her advantage, and pursued it venomously. She said she had known Charlotte for more than twelve years; and that, on a visit to her son Enoch, in North Nincum, where she belonged, she had learned all about her recent proceedings. These had led to the disgrace of her family, and to her own flight. The story was one that the old lady could not have invented; and the confident manner in which she identified Miss Woods with the girl at North Nincum produced an overwhelming effect upon Hector.

Meanwhile, in company with the bitter old lady, he arrived at the house. Phœbe being absent, Charlotte was found in conversation with Mrs. Jackwood, who was busy preparing dinner. Grandmother Rigglesly moved by them like a muttering cloud, dropping rain from her wet apron, which she gave a final twist, before hanging it upon the oven-door to dry.

"O! O!" — starting and clapping her hand behind her, — "my poor back!"

Mrs. Jackwood ran to her assistance: "I'll take care o' that, mother!" — spreading out the apron. — "Sed down, Hector, — I can't make it come handy to call you Mr. Dunbury. — Le' me take off your wet shoes an' stockin's," — to the old lady.

"No, never mind! I can do it, I guess, — if I can't, it's jest as well. I wish that door could be kep' shet once! There's a draft of air comes right on to my shoulders and neck!"

Charlotte arose and closed the door. Hector's eyes followed her with a searching look, which startled her, as she turned and caught his eye.

"O, don't trouble yourself, I beg!" said the old lady, as Mrs. Jackwood insisted on removing her wet stockings. "'T need n't make a mite o' difference, jes' cause there's visitors here; they won't mind the looks, though you should n't think I'm wuth makin' a fuss over, — for I'm sensible I an't, myself: I've had that lesson to larn perty thoroughly in my old age!"

And, with a disconsolate air, grandmother Rigglesly fumbled in her bag for the Good Samaritan, and consulted him in her trouble, as of old. Having dried her eyes, she looked down and saw Rover wagging his tail, and regarding her with an expression that seemed to say, "Did n't we have capital fun?" — upon which she converted the handkerchief into a whip, and made a sudden and spiteful cut with it at the good-natured cur.

"There! I wish to goodness somebody'd take that dog and chop his head off!"

"Why, what has the dog done?" cried Mrs. Jackwood.

As she spoke, Rover rallied, and, making a pounce at the Good Samaritan, seized him with his teeth and paws, and began to shake and tear him, in a prodigious sham fury.

"You see what he's done!" ejaculated the old lady. "Gi' me them tongs!"

Forgetting her rheumatism and wet feet, she started from the chair, and, with one stocking off, and one stocking on, like "my son John," of high-diddle-dumpling memory, commenced an animated pursuit of Rover around the room. The poor dog was at last fairly cornered, and the forked thunderbolt was about to fall prone upon the head and front of his offending, when the door

was opportunely opened, and Bim made his appearance, blustering.

"Here, Rover!" he cried, — "cut!"

At the word, with craven head, and tail depressed, Rover darted between the legs of his young master, and whisked out of the house, while the tongs came down upon the floor behind him with a jar which filled the old lady's arm with stings, from the fingers to the elbow.

"There! That's all for you, you good-for-nothing! I've broke my arm — perty nigh!"

Bim, undaunted: "You might let the dog alone!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "Bim'lech! Bim'lech!"

Bim, stoutly: "She begun it!"

Old lady: "O, I would n't interfere! Let him sass me all he wants to; that's what I was made for, I s'pose! It's all owin' to him, 't I got my feet wet. He left the boat right where he know'd 't would go off with anybody if they jest stepped into it. I never see sich ugliness!"

After that, there was a lull, — Mrs. Rigglesly heating her feet at the stove, with now and then a deep, prolonged sigh of ostentatious suffering; Bim looking sheepish, and drumming on the window, as Charlotte inquired about his health and spirits; Hector twirling his hat; and Mrs. Jackwood apologizing.

"Sakes alive!" suddenly burst forth the old lady; "look at that shoe! I declare if 't an't comin' to pieces! Them new pair 't I bought o' that plaguy pedler o' yourn, only 't other day, an' paid ten cents more for 'n I ever pay for shoes, on account o' the extry soles, an' now, the fust time they git a little grain wet, — only look at 'em!"

"When you have come to my years," said Hector, "you will have learned to beware of extra pretensions. As with people, so with shoes. — Give me a glass of water, Mrs. Jackwood, and we will go home. We are promised fish for dinner, and I have a foreshadowing of thirst."

"Our well's give out, this summer," said Mrs. Jackwood. "Phoebe's gone to the spring for water, an' I'm expectin' her back every minute."

"She's off readin' that nasty novil, somewheres!" spoke up grandmother Rigglesty. "She's at it every chance she can git. I'd burn it up, if she was a child o' mine!"

"If she was a child of mine"—— said Hector.

Old lady, sharply: "Wal, what if she was?"

"Then you would be my mother!— Good-by. — We'll not wait for Phœbe."

Old lady, muttering: "I wish that door could be kep' shet! There, they're gone, arter so long a time! That Hector's jes' like his father, for all the world, — only more so, if anything!"

Bim, following the visitors to the gate, gave vent to his feelings in breathing defiance against the old lady.

"What are you going to do with that pipe?" asked Charlotte.

Bim, desperately: "It's *hern*; and I'm goin' to put some powder in it, an' blow her up, to pay her!"

Hector: "I take it, then, she blows you up, sometimes."

"I don't care for her!" — Bim swung his head, with a swaggering expression. — "I put thistles in her han'kerchief, t' other day! Golly! did n't she scream!"

Charlotte, taking the boy's hand: "I'm afraid you are not so good to her as you might be."

Bim, earnestly: "Who could? — Here, Rove," — pulling the dog's ears, — "say good-by!"

"Yahowawooooiii!" said Rover, compromising a howl with a yawn.

On the way home, Charlotte felt a cloud resting upon her spirit. It was heaviest and chilliest when Hector was nearest. Through it his smiles looked cold, and his laugh sounded hard and hollow to her ear.

He appeared to notice her but little, but went bowling large stones along the road; sometimes throwing them high in the air, and catching them dexterously as they came down.

"This is life! How we poor mortals toil and sweat over our serious games! And what is the result of it all? A little dust, like that this cobble raises in the road!"

The missile, bounding from the path, leaped through the fence into a clump of bushes, growing on the other side

"O dear! O! O! O!" screamed a shrill voice; and straightway out ran a wild-looking creature into the field, bareheaded, with hair flying, and hands clasped over her ears.

"Ha!" said Hector, "there's unexpected game!"

"I am afraid she is hurt!" cried Charlotte.

"Not she; else she would scream less, according to the rule of shams. If a man is frightened, he blusters; if hurt, he says little; if killed, he maintains a wise silence. This holds good, as a general rule; but perhaps Phœbe Jackwood is an exception. — Are you hurt, Phœbe?"

Phœbe: "I guess so! I'm so scar't I don't know a word I do, or anything I say! What was that?"

"A hailstone, Phœbe! Come here, and let me look at the hole in your head."

Phœbe, quickly putting up her hand: "Is there one? Where? tell me!"

"Give me your hand; and I'll show you."

She ran up to the fence, and Hector reached over to her. "It opens every time you speak. There!" And, placing her finger in her mouth, he closed her teeth upon it.

"That's just like you, Hector Dunbury! If 't was anybody else, I never'd speak to you again!"

Pouting a little, and blushing a good deal, Phœbe ran behind the sumachs, confusedly putting up her hair by the way.

"Is that what you call a hailstone?" she cried, tossing the cobble over the fence. "You threw it!"

"To be sure; and it was a friendly hail, Phœbe. You should have hailed me pleasantly in return, instead of going off in a fright."

"I guess you'd 'ave been frightened to have a great rock come thrashing through the bushes on to your head, when you was asleep! Would n't he, Charlotte?"

"If anything could frighten him," said Charlotte. "What book have you?"

"Alonzo and Melissa. Did you ever read it? I wish I had n't begun it, for I don't like it a bit, — but I can't let it alone till it's finished, any way. I set up till two o'clock last

night, and got so excited over it that when I went to bed I could n't sleep a wink, but see balls of fire, and heard doors slam, and felt cold hands on my arm, all the rest of the night; and I've been so sleepy all day I can't hardly keep my eyes open."

Phoebe handed the book to Charlotte through the rails; then, having passed her pail of water over to Hector, and asked him to turn around, and not look, she began to climb the fence.

Hector made a cup of a basswood-leaf, and, having filled it for Charlotte to drink, and afterwards drank out of it himself, shook the water from it into Phoebe's face.

"You are a dull girl to fall asleep over Alonzo and Melissa! Good-by. Your mother is waiting for you."

"Dont hurry off so! I would n't have got over the fence, only I thought you'd stop and talk a minute."

"I've no minute to spare. Time is precious, Phoebe, and I hear Bridget blowing the dinner-horn. Go, and take that fatal stone with you, as a keepsake. It has waked you from one dream of romance; and it may save you from many another, if you will treasure it as a type of man's heart, and look at it whenever you think of falling in love."

"If that is a type of man's heart, what is a type of woman's?" asked Charlotte.

"Still a stone, but it should be hollow. And yet not every heart is so — not every heart!" added Hector, in a changed tone.

He walked away with Charlotte in silence, leaving the gay Phoebe to roll the cobble carefully in her apron, and carry it to the house with her pail of water.

Scarce another word was spoken by either Hector or his companion, until they reached home. Then, as they were passing under the porch, Charlotte, whose heart was full, could restrain herself no longer.

"How dissatisfied you are with me to-day!" she said, in a low, tremulous tone.

"With all the world, and with myself most of all!" rejoined Hector.

Charlotte would have asked "Why?"

"Because," said Hector, perceiving her thoughts, "I have made a discovery."

Discovery! The word fell upon her heart with stunning power; for a moment nerve and breath and strength were taken away, and she wished that she might fall down at Hector's feet, and never rise up more.

"It is," he added, smiling bitterly,—"I have left my fishing-pole at Mr. Jackwood's!"

He strode through the hall; while Charlotte, following, and finding her way to her room, sank, almost lifelessly, upon her bed, and lay there in trance-like despair, until the harsh voice of Bridget came to announce that the pickerel was on the table, and the dinner waiting.

XI.

DANGEROUS SYMPTOMS.

FROM that day Hector's conduct towards Charlotte was marked by strange inconsistencies. Sometimes, spontaneously, from his lips the tenderest words fell like warm rain upon the flowers of her heart; then the lightning of his wit flashed out upon her, sharp and sudden, from the cloud of his bitter melancholy; or the cold breath of his assumed indifference chilled her like the north wind.

One day, when she had suffered extremely from his fitful treatment, Mrs. Dunbury called her to her side. The good woman was reposing in her easy-chair, and her countenance beamed with a broken and sorrowful smile as Charlotte drew near, and seated herself at her feet.

"My dear child," — and the invalid laid her hand with a gentle touch upon the young girl's head, — "my heart compels me to speak to you on a subject which we have both avoided too long. Let us be true, let us be friends indeed, Charlotte, if not for my sake or yours, then for my son's — for Hector's." — There was a pause. Charlotte's very soul stood still, and the silence seemed to ring as she listened. — "You will tell me if I am wrong, but I think — I am sure — Hector loves you!"

Charlotte started, and gazed with a questioning look into her friend's benignant face.

"If it is so," said Mrs. Dunbury, "I shall not be displeased. Only tell me true."

"But it is not so!" exclaimed Charlotte, with singular vehemence. "He dislikes me! — you know he does!"

"If you say so, my child, I will believe at least that you think so. But I imagined he had made advances to you —"

“Never ! never !”

“You will pardon me, then, for troubling you,” said the invalid : “but, O,” — with starting tears, — “if you but knew how much his destiny depends upon the affections of his heart ! I will tell you a secret, Charlotte. There is — it is better that you should know — a taint in our family of — hereditary insanity.”

A thrill of horror shot through Charlotte.

“I am a mother,” the invalid said, “and I am, perhaps, weak and foolish. But this concerns you, and I need your aid and sympathy.”

“What have I done ? What can I do ?” demanded Charlotte.

“Be quiet, my good child, and hear me. I see no safety for my son but in a happy marriage ; nor can I be at rest until I behold his tempest-tossed passion anchored in some pure and loving bosom, like your own. A misplaced affection is the most I have to fear. There, dear Charlotte,” — the invalid dropped a tear on her companion’s hand, — “I have laid open to you the most sacred apartment of my heart : you will not profane the trust, I know.”

For the moment, Charlotte was overpowered with conflicting emotions. Amazement and distress, not unaccompanied by a certain vague, fearful joy, sent the swift crimson and pallor chasing each other in her face. Twice she attempted to speak ; then, sinking upon her knees before her friend, she hid her face in that maternal lap, and wept. Embracing her, and soothing her with sympathetic words, Mrs. Dunbury lifted her up. Then, with a firm but gentle dignity, Charlotte spoke.

“I am grateful, I cannot tell you how grateful, for your kind thoughts of me, and your good will ! I would lay down my life for you, and count it as nothing. But I can never be Hector’s — he can never be mine !”

“One word,” said Mrs. Dunbury, in a faint voice ; “could you love him ?”

“That is a thought which even in my dreams I have not dared to entertain.”

“Ah, Charlotte ! I think I read in your heart what you dare not read yourself. Cover it up, — cover it, by all means, from him, — until he calls for it.”

"He will never call for it! And if he should," exclaimed Charlotte, "I could not give it him! I will go; I will leave your house this day! It will be better for me, — better for you and him."

Mrs. Dunbury strained her to her bosom. Charlotte struggled to free herself.

"You know not whom you take to your heart!" she said, with increased passion. "And your son, if he has a thought of love for me, he knows not how worse than thrown away it is! We are divided by a destiny sharper than swords! Do not question me, for I can tell you nothing. Because I cannot, — because, if I stay, I must conceal and deceive; because I would not repay your kindness and trust by such ingratitude, — I will go, and go at once."

"No, Charlotte, you shall stay! Keep your secret," said the invalid, "if you will; but stay, dear Charlotte, and you will not only confer a blessing on me, but perhaps save another from the worst fate that can befall."

Charlotte was deeply moved.

"No, no! I must not, I cannot! Your love burns me like fire!"

"Hush!" said Mrs. Dunbury. "I hear his step."

Scarcely had Charlotte time to regain her feet, when the door opened. Hector entered, and threw himself upon a chair, while the curtains of the recess, behind which she had hastily taken refuge, were still rustling.

"Where have you been, my son?"

"Upon the mountain, to free my lungs, mother. I should stifle if I did not climb occasionally above the reek of human breaths. I fell asleep under a tree, and waked to find a wood-chuck smelling of my boot. The mantle-hem of civilization lies so thin and ravelled on that altitude, that the wild beasts have not yet become corrupted by the acquaintance of man."

"How pale you look! Are you ill?"

"No, mother. I have been fighting."

"Fighting, my son! With whom?"

"With my worst enemy, dear mother."

"O, why do you have these terrible struggles with yourself?"

"Because I find in myself that rebellion which is to be crushed!"

"I would you were a Christian!" breathed the pious woman.

"I would I were, indeed; for if I had that grace, I might convert another, — then the world could boast of two."

Mrs. Dunbury changed her tactics: "You should be married, Hector."

"Why, so I should; and so should every man. But how much easier it is said than done!"

"You vex me when you talk so. You might have been married five years ago."

"After a fashion, mother; but I thank my stars that my neck escaped the yoke; for I have learned to prize in woman high qualities never dreamed of in the heat and passion of my youth. What if I were united to such a one as I should then have chosen?" Hector shuddered. "God be praised for the institution of old maids and bachelors, say I!"

He took up a book. But, having commenced to sound him on a subject near to her heart, his mother pursued it still.

"You must not look for perfection, my son."

"I look for nothing, — only for the heart that can command the full power of mine."

"Need you go far for that? If you do not require wealth, or position, there are certainly women of soul —"

"Name one, mother!"

"To speak at random," said Mrs. Dunbury, carelessly, — "or, rather, to commence nearest home, there is —"

"Charlotte!" added Hector, with a smile, glancing towards the recess.

"Perhaps she would not have you," said the invalid, with an affected laugh; "but you might make the attempt."

"Mother," said Hector, severely, "if you jest, your wit is unseasonable. If you are in earnest, your speech lacks discretion. Charlotte may be all a fond mother could wish for her darling son, but certainly you would not expect me to marry her unless I loved her."

Mrs. Dunbury's eyes glistened. "How can you help loving her?"

"How can you help loving — pickles?"

"That's a foolish question, Hector."

"Or an answer to a foolish question, dear mother!"

Hector threw down the book, and left the room.

"Charlotte!" whispered Mrs. Dunbury.

Very pale, but with a fair, calm dignity of mien, Charlotte came forth.

"Did you hear what was said?"

"I have heard all!"

"And you are not offended?"

"O, no, I am glad!" said Charlotte, smiling.

"And — you will not leave us?"

"Not unless you wish it. I am stronger now, and I will stay."

She spoke with her graceful form drawn up to its full height, with the roused spirit of pride shining through her face, and flashing in her eyes.

At that moment Hector returned for his hat. Taking it from the table, he passed on, and opened the curtains before the recess where the girl had stood.

"What are you looking for?" asked his mother.

"Excuse me, — but I am trying to discover what has made Charlotte grow so tall, and given her so fine a color, within the last five minutes."

XII.

THE WEDDING.

THERE was to be a wedding in the village, to which the Dunburys were invited ; and it devolved upon Hector to represent the family. To his mother's surprise and gratification, he engaged to undertake the responsibility, upon one condition. "Charlotte," said he, "shall go with me."

Charlotte shrank from the thought of seeing society ; but she had no good excuse to offer—not even on the score of dress ; for since her residence with the Dunburys she had been liberally provided for, in that respect. Notwithstanding, therefore, certain forebodings she had, she suffered herself to be overcome by solicitation, and gave her promise to accompany Hector.

The ceremony was to take place in the evening ; and in due season Corny brought the horse and buggy to the door.

"It is a brave wedding we are going to !" said Hector, as he drove away. "The fair young bride is in her thirty-fifth summer,—a little gray and faded, but for the virtues of a judicious hair-wash, and the excellent care taken of her complexion. When I was a school-boy, aged ten, she was the belle of the village, and had as many lovers as she could count on her fingers and toes. Old men renewed their age to become her suitors, and boys were as sure to fall in love with her as they were to have down on their chins. It was expected of them, just as we look for measles in children. I was one of the predestinated, and at sixteen experienced two days of excessive melancholy in consequence of a rejection. Well, having suffered the first and second generation of her admirers to pass away, she has chosen one out of a third thin brood of weaklings, who have managed to get up a feeble show of the ancient custom, in these latter days."

Charlotte hoped the bridegroom was worthy.

"O, he is worthy enough, — although, to speak truth, she would not have lowered even her haughty glance to his level, five years ago."

"Why will she now, then?"

"Because he stands to her in the interesting position of a last chance for a husband. And it is so very horrible to live an old maid, you know!"

"But," said Charlotte, "it is dreadful — such a union!"

"O, it will do, it will do, as matches average!"

Arrived at the bride's house, Hector and Charlotte were ushered into the presence of a large company in a crowded apartment, — some silent, some conversing in subdued voices, and all very solemn.

"If I had never been to a wedding before," whispered Hector, "I should think we had made a mistake, and got into a funeral."

Suddenly there was a hush, and the happy pair, appearing with the bridesmaids and groomsmen, marched to the place assigned them in the light of the wax candles. The centre of observation was of course the bride. She was of such commanding presence, that the pretty Mr. Creston, with his weak face and slender shoulders, seemed scarce noticeable at her side.

"How pale she looks!" said Bertha Wing, who sat with Mr. Rukely, at Charlotte's left hand. "What a strange brightness in her eye!"

Hector turned with a smile which sent the blood tingling to her cheeks.

"She is taking her last look at her bright ideal, Bertha. Or perhaps the phantoms of a thousand old-time lovers are flitting between her and the light."

Bertha, troubled: "She will be happier when it is all over."

Hector: "So you may say of a drowning man!"

Mr. Rukely, mildly: "Let us have charity!"

Hector: "Amen, with all my heart! Yet it stirs the gall within me, to see a woman, capable of loving, desecrate the sanctity of her soul by mumbling vows with one utterly powerless to call her passion out!"

Bertha, becoming suddenly pale as the bride, looked hastily around, to see if the remark had been overheard. Mr. Rukely smiled benignly, and, making a sign for silence, directed attention to the ceremony.

This was performed by a staid old clergyman of the village, who married the happy couple fast and strong, and blessed the union. Congratulations and kisses followed; and at length refreshments were introduced, — jellies, nuts, coffee, and several kinds of costly cake, all very fine and very indigestible, together with a feast of reason, to which the company was invited by the bridegroom's uncle. He was a wrinkle-browed, snuff-taking, old-fashioned individual, with a wise grimace, spectacles, and stiff iron-gray hair stuck up all over his head.

"My daughter Etty," said he, enunciating with slow precision "has prepared a poetical address, appropriate to the occasion, which she will proceed to deliver. — Etty!"

A girl of thirteen, with a large forehead and great eyes, supposed to be a genius, stepped forward promptly.

"It's all her own composition," remarked the child's mother, by way of prologue. "She wrote it without any assistance."

"Mrs. Greenwich," interrupted her husband, with lofty disapprobation, "I am talking now! Daughter!" — raising his hand, — "one, two, three, — begin!"

At the word, Etty rattled away, like a militia company firing at command, with a volley of blank verses levelled at the newly-married pair.

Mother, parenthetically: "Not quite so fast, daughter."

Father, severely: "I'll dictate, if you please, Mrs. Greenwich!"

The lady nodded deferentially. Etty went on, holding her hands stiffly folded across her lap, and looking down, as if reciting to the carpet. The substance of the poem was, that the happy pair were a strong oak and a graceful vine yoked together in the car of matrimony, and sailing over a sapphire ocean, in a little Eden of their own, full of flowery fountains, rainbows, the prodigal son, and the wise virgins with the oil in their lamps. Quite a round of applause greeted the conclusion.

"I want you all to understand," said the mother of the genius "that the poem was composed in one hour and forty minutes —"

"Mrs. Greenwich! I was about to speak!"

Mrs. G., meekly: "O, certainly!"

Mr. G.: "Daughter!"

Young genius, prettily: "What, father?"

"I want you to recite the last part again, commencing at the line, '*There Flora spreads,*' and let your voice rise at '*spangled groves.*' Slowly and distinctly."

Encouraged by the praises already bestowed, Etty repeated the concluding lines with improved confidence, and won additional applause. The bride, who had borne up under the infliction with smiling patience, thanked the little prodigy for her compliments and good wishes, and asked for a copy of the verses.

"A copy for me, too, Etty," said the bridegroom.

Blushing bridesmaid: "I speak for a copy!"

Two or three, in a breath: "Me, too, Etty!"

Chorus of voices: "Wonderful genius!" — "Be-e-e-aautiful!" — "Sweet pretty!" — "Ought to be printed!"

Mr. Greenwich: "Daughter, what have you got to say?"

Young genius, ready with a speech: "I thank you all very kindly for your good opinion —"

Mrs. Greenwich, in a whisper: "Go on, — what is it about talents?"

"If God has seen fit to endow me with talents, I ought not to take any credit to myself, but show my gratitude by trying to make a good use of them. At the same time, I trust my friends will be less ready to praise than to tell me of my faults."

More applause. Little prodigy's head quite turned. Mrs. G. excited and silly. Mr. G. prosy on the subject of his daughter's talents.

Bertha, holding Etty's hand: "Come and see me, and I'll give you a pretty subject for a poem."

Hector: "Come and see me, and I'll give you something better."

Young genius, with a curtesy: "Thank you! May I ask what it would be?"

Hector. "Some good advice."

Young genius: "I suppose you do not like my poetry, then."

"My child," said Hector, kindly, drawing her towards him, "I like you" — he dropped his voice — "much better than I like your verses. You can afford to let me say so much, can't you, since everybody else is praising them? You said your friends were to tell you of your faults; and if you would like to have me mention one little one, to begin with —"

The genius repulsed him peevishly, and went pouting to her mother.

Mrs. G., resentfully: "What have you been saying to her?"

Hector smiled: "The truth, simply. Is she so unaccustomed to the taste of that article, that it bites her tongue?"

There was a good deal of disapprobation expressed, in an indirect way, against Hector's proceeding, generally by those who experienced a secret joy at the young prodigy's discomfiture.

"And you, Charlotte, — you blame me with the rest?"

"Were you not a little cruel?" answered Charlotte.

"Charlotte," — a deep emotion struggled in Hector's voice, — "I could endure that every person here to-night should misjudge me, malign me, think me ill-natured and egotistical, except you!"

The young girl felt a joyous thrill. Why was it? Had she not believed and preached to her poor heart, night and day, that there was, there could be, no one single slenderest tie of sympathy between her and Hector?

"I was cruel," said he, "because I would be kind. And, believe me, to wound the poor child's feelings as I did, was the hardest thing I have had to do for weeks, — except when I have so often wounded yours!"

"You thought it necessary to give me pain!"

"Yes, — and no. I cannot explain now. I have wronged you! Not so much in my acts as in my thoughts. I have so much to say to you!"

Charlotte could not speak one word. She could not raise her eyes. The sound of Mr. Rukely's voice recalled her to herself. He had taken Hector's place at her side. But his words rustled merely, and fell away from her like husks. He left her to give

room to others. Already her rare graces had made her the centre of an admiring circle, and frivolous young men brought compliments to purchase her smiles. Their commonplace prattle wearied her; it cost an effort to treat them with civility; and she was glad when the arrival of an unexpected guest occasioned a whirl of interest, which left her, for a moment, free to follow her own thoughts.

Her mind was with Hector. Amid all the throng and buzz, she saw his form and heard the music of his voice alone. Until one came between her and him. It was the new guest. She saw the two shake hands with a certain freedom which betokened old familiar acquaintance. She saw the new face, she heard the new voice, she felt the new presence, with a sudden overwhelming shock. What followed she knew not, until she found herself, all unnerved and shaken, clinging to the door of the dressing-room, whither she had instinctively fled.

It was a small apartment, with a bed at one side, covered with bonnets and shawls, and a bureau opposite, on which there was a lamp burning dimly in the gloom. In utter helplessness, she sank upon a chair. But a rustling of the bed-curtains warned her that she was not alone. Among the garments thrown upon the side of the bed, an object moved, arose, and turned upon her a child's face, with eyes that shone large, and red, and swollen, in the dull light of the lamp. It was Etty, the genius.

"Have you seen him?" she asked, timidly.

Charlotte controlled as well as she could the agitation of her heart, and said, kindly, "Have I seen whom?"

"My brother Robert. I had been crying; and he always used to dislike me when I cried, — so I ran in here. He has been away a year; and I have wanted him to come home so much! But he won't care to see me, — do you think he will?"

The child seemed to cling to Charlotte for sympathy and help. She was a child indeed then. The genius and the prodigy had disappeared. The hard shell of affectation, in which her young nature was cased, was burst by the swelling of her heart.

"Yes," — Charlotte scarce knowing what she said, — "I am sure he will be glad to see you, — if he is your brother."

"But he never answered my letters, and I wrote him such long ones, and took so much pains with them! I wish you would go out with me to see him!"

"O, no, — that would do no good! All your friends are out there; and I — I am a stranger to all of you, you know."

"I don't care; you don't seem so. I'd rather you would go with me, than mother, or father, or any of them. I can't tell why, but you make me feel so."

Charlotte took the child in her arms, and pressed her close.

"You are a good girl," said she, "and I'm sure your brother can't help loving you, if you are always simple and true."

"He says I am so odd!"

"Perhaps that is because you try too hard to be a lady, and are not enough a child. But no matter now. Go out and see him. And — would you be afraid to speak to Mr. Dunbury?"

"He did n't like my poetry!" said the child, quickly.

"Perhaps the fault was as much in your poetry as in him," suggested Charlotte.

"I know it was! They were silly lines, and I never will write any more as long as I live!"

"O, yes, you will write more, — and write a great deal better for what he told you. I know he meant it kindly."

"I will speak to him, if you wish me to," said Etty, thoughtfully.

"And say that I am here, and would like to see him."

The child was glad to do anything to oblige her new friend; and, having dried her eyes, and made Charlotte tell her again that her brother would be glad to see her, she went timidly forth.

Left to her own thoughts, Charlotte endeavored to be calm. She felt a powerful impulse to tell Hector everything, throw herself upon his mercy, and then, if he cast her from him — Cast her from him! The thought chilled her; and when, at length, she heard a hand on the latch, she shrank within herself, and would, if possible, have fled even from his sight.

But the comer was not Hector. It was Etty again.

"I dropped my handkerchief," said the child, getting down to look for it on the floor.

"Here it is, by my feet." Charlotte took it up, and gave it her.

Etty, wiping her eyes: "Thank you. I told Mr. Dunbury, and he said he would come. I saw Robert, too; but he only just looked at me, and went on talking and laughing with the rest, as if I was nobody! I don't care now! He hates me, and I might have known he would."

At that moment Hector entered. Etty tried to escape, but he caught her in his arms.

"Do you dislike me very much for what I said?"

She hid her face; and Hector kissed her forehead.

"I believed that you had a true heart, and a real desire to do well," he said, kindly; "so I thought it best to tell you of your faults, in order that you might correct them. You must be patient and humble, and aim at something more excellent than indiscriminate praise, if you would have your wings grow out beautiful and strong. You have wings; but, O, you only flutter with them a little now, instead of flying into the very dome of heaven, as your flatterers would have you think. This is what I wanted to say to you; now, if you dislike me for it, I am very sorry."

Hector kissed her again, and told her that she might go. How noble and good he seemed to Charlotte then! Etty felt comforted. He had touched a chord that had never been touched before.

As he was about to speak again, the door opened. A qualm smote Charlotte's heart, as she heard once more the tones of that dreaded voice.

"Ah! here is the fugitive!" The speaker paused at the door. Charlotte felt cold from head to foot. But she did not stir, nor raise her eyes, nor betray any sign of emotion, save in the pallor of her face. — "I beg pardon!" — smiling and bowing. "Is that you, Hector? Who would have thought of stumbling upon you here? I suppose I ought to know that lady, too — but — such a dim, religious light — excuse me, — I was looking for that choice sister of mine."

He patted Etty's cheek, — at the same time, his keen eyes glancing at Charlotte.

"We have just been getting a little acquainted," said Hector, giving Etty into her brother's arms. "She is too good a heart to be a sister of yours."

"So our beloved mother says! She thought I hurt your feelings, just now, sis, and sent me to ask your forgiveness."

"O, no — you did not —"

"She has scolded me, too, for not answering your letters. You did n't mind that, though, — for you knew I never liked school-girl compositions. Come, don't pout! I was in hopes you had outgrown your odd ways. Is this lady your friend, too?"

Etty, struggling from him, reached the door and escaped. He followed her, pausing, as he went, to apologize once more for his intrusion. Then Hector, impatient, closed the door, and returned to Charlotte's side.

"What is this? Why are you so pale?" He gave her his hand; but, rising up, she tottered to the window. "Charlotte, what can I do for you?"

"Take me home — let me see no one — say that I am ill. When I am calm, I will tell you. Be my friend — until then!"

"Till then — and forever!" exclaimed Hector. "Trust in me; lean upon my arm; and the world shall wrench my life out, before I will let you go. Sit here till I come back. Courage, dear heart, courage!"

She made haste to find her things and put them on; and by the time he returned, she was ready to accompany him. They went out together unobserved. His buggy was at the door; he helped her in; then, seated by his side, with the darkness of the road before them, the lighted windows behind, and the silence and the starlight all around, the excitement which had nerved her flight subsided, and she sank helpless as an infant on his arm.

At length, putting his arm gently away: "How inconsistent I must appear to you! Still you have patience with me!"

"Patience, Charlotte? For weeks I have studied you with jealous eyes. If ever soul read soul, mine has read yours, — and I am satisfied. I wronged you once, as I told you. You had slandered yourself in my ear; and it was my fortune to hear an evil report, that I construed into an interpretation of what re-

mained unexplained in your words. I will not repeat what was told me; I am ashamed to confess the source from which it came; — but, Charlotte, it was by the very strength of my interest in you that I became so weak.”

“Perhaps you were not weak — perhaps you saw me better then than you do now.”

“Stop!” said Hector. “No more self-slander. I know you, Charlotte. By treating you harshly,—by appearing cruel, bitter, disdainful,—I have discovered the depth and sweetness of your nature. What inward conflicts have heaved and torn me, the while! O, Charlotte, if you knew! But no more of this. I see you crushed to-night beneath a burden; let me first take that away,—then we can talk.”

“Not now — my tongue is numb! — To-morrow —”

“To-morrow we may have no opportunity. I expect company.”

“Company?”

“After I left you in the dressing-room, Robert Greenwich got me by the button, and told me he should try to call to-morrow afternoon: he will probably be with us at tea.”

Hector went on talking, but Charlotte heard no more. She did not answer when he spoke to her. At length she repeated, vacantly, “At tea? Did you say, to-morrow?”

“Your mind is on some other subject. Let Robert Greenwich go. He is nothing to you or me, to-night.”

“Did he — did he speak — of me?”

“He apologized again for intruding upon us, and said he hoped to meet you to-morrow.”

That she had been recognized by the man she dreaded, Charlotte could no longer doubt. She tried to tell Hector all her fear and despair; but misgivings chilled her heart, and sealed her lips, and sent her to her lonely room, that night, with the heavy secret of her life still pent up in her soul.

XIII.

THE VISIT AND THE EXCURSION.

THE next morning, Abimelech Jackwood the younger made an early call at Mr. Dunbury's house. He found the family at breakfast.

"Good-morning, sir!" cried Hector. "Corny, give the young gentleman a seat."

"Can't stop!" said Bim, standing bashfully in the door. "I come over to see — git out, Rover! — if Charlotte don't want'er go up on the hill to-day, with Pheeb."

A gleam of hope shone upon Charlotte's heart.

"To see Bertha Wing?"

"Yes, I b'lieve so. — Here, Rove! lay down! — Pheeb's ben lottin' on an all-day visit up there, 's ever s' long, and she said you 'greed to go with her."

"But you are so poorly this morning, Charlotte!" said Mrs. Dunbury. "Conscientiously as you have endeavored to eat, you have scarce tasted a morsel."

Hector: "And we are to have company, you remember."

"But I," said Charlotte, quickly, — "I would prefer not to meet strangers. I would enjoy the ride, and a quiet visit with Phoebe and Bertha —"

Mrs. Dunbury: "Do as you please, then."

Charlotte glanced at Hector. His countenance was overcast, but he raised no further objection to the plan; and accordingly word was sent back that she would accompany Phoebe.

Miss Jackwood made her appearance in the one-horse wagon, at about nine o'clock. She drove old Dan, — quite a conservative and phlegmatic nag, — whom she found it necessary continu-

ally to urge forward, by means of a little, stumpy whip. Arrived within speaking distance of Mr. Dunbury's gate, the sober animal came to a dead halt. "Go 'long!" ejaculated Phoebe.

Dan did not stir. Mortified at the awkwardness of the circumstance, occurring at a moment when she so much desired to make a smart appearance, she wielded the whip vigorously.

The first blow fell short; the second raised a dust on the horse's rump, and the third made him whisk his tail a little. After that, she bent forward, and laid on and spared not, until, starting on with a groan, he stopped before the gate.

The delay had given Charlotte time to put on her bonnet, and she now came out, ready for the ride.

"I was afraid you would n't go," said Phoebe; "but I was feeling so vexed about the wedding, last night, I meant to make a visit somewhere, to-day, any way. Bim said you expected company. Who's coming?"

"Mr. Greenwich, I think."

"Not Robert? Has he got home? I should think you 'd like to stay! I'll stay with you, and make you a visit, to-day, if you want me to. Or, I'll tell you what! have Robert and Hector come up and take tea with us!—You tell 'em, Mrs. Dunbury!—I bet they will! Won't it be grand?"

How pale Charlotte looked!

"Don't forget, Mrs. Dunbury!—Go 'long, ol' Dan!—I 'm ashamed of my driving! The calves chewed the whip to pieces, t' other night, and this is all there is left of it; and Dan's the laziest horse!—Come, do step!—If Mr. and Mrs. Charles Creston git invited to my wedding, I guess they 'll know it! I'll let 'em understand one thing—I don't care if I was n't asked: it han't hurt me a bit; for I don't consider it anything worth minding at all!"

Phoebe seemed so desirous of enforcing this fact upon her companion's mind, that she never ceased to chatter about it, until they had made the ascent of the hill, and arrived at Mr. Wing's house. Charlotte liked that topic as well as any; all she wished was, that Phoebe should do the talking, and leave her to her own thoughts.

Bertha received her visitors cordially; grandmother Wing joining to give them a hearty welcome.

"Why, how you have altered!" said the old lady, with smiling good-nature, to Charlotte. "You've smarted up amazin', I do declare! I knowed 't was in ye to do it, when I spoke for you to Hector; but, re'ly, I'm the least mite took back to see you lookin' so *very* nice an' handsome!"

Phoebe had brought her knitting; Charlotte had some sewing; and all settled quietly down, to work, and talk, and visit, until near dinner-time, when Bertha went out to assist the kitchen-girl, and to give the finishing touch to the table.

Just as they were sitting down to the noon-day meal, Mr. Rukely called, and sat down with them. Mr. Wing was also present, — a man of solemn aspect and stiff opinions, of whom Bertha stood very much in awe.

The dinner was a prim and formal affair; everybody silent or restrained, as was to be expected; only the old lady indulging in a little geniality, while Phoebe now and then burst forth with some refreshingly spontaneous remark.

"O dear!" exclaimed the young girl, after dinner, "I'm so tired of behaving well! Do le's have some fun! Mr. Rukely will excuse us."

Mr. Rukely, turning over the leaves of an annual: "O, certainly."

Bertha: "What do you want to do?"

Phoebe, throwing down her knitting: "I don't care what; but I shall die if I don't do something! Come, le's make cheeses!"

Bertha, blushing and shaking her head: "'Sh! Not before him!"

Charlotte: "If we take a walk, perhaps Mr. Rukely will accompany us."

Mr. Rukely: "With pleasure."

Phoebe: "Hurra!"

Bertha: "We'll want our bonnets, girls."

Phoebe: "I'm glad you spoke, for I don't know half what I am about! May we be wild, Mr. Rukely?"

Mr. Rukely, indulgently: "As wild as you please."

Phœbe : "That's good ! When we get out of sight and hearing once, if I don't scream ! Which way are you going ?"

Mr. Rukely : "Shall we take the road ?"

Charlotte : "The woods will be pleasanter ; the road is too tame."

Phœbe : "O, yes ! we can chase and romp in the woods, and have such a slick time ! Mr. Rukely will let down the bars for us. What do you say, Bertha ?"

Bertha : "Any way will suit me. Only don't be too rude," — aside to Phœbe, — "for I don't know just what he will think."

Phœbe, recklessly : "Come on ! I'll be cap'n ! How good it feels ou' doors ! I want to fly ! Let's go 'way off on the mountain, and look down towards our house. I wish Hector and Rob Greenwich was here ! don't you, girls ? If we had a spying-glass we might see 'em ! It's so mean I wan't invited to the wedding ! but I'm glad of it ! Don't let's go through the briers."

Bertha : "There's a path somewhere. O, here it is ! 'T will take us right to the cedar woods."

Phœbe ran on before, talking gayly. Suddenly she flew back, with terrified cries.

Bertha : "Why, what — what is it ?"

Phœbe, shudderingly : "Ugh-h-h-h ! A gr-e-a-t bi-i-ig sna-a-ake !"

Mr. Rukely, smiling : "You should learn to overcome the serpent." Taking up a stick : "Where is he ?"

Phœbe : "It was crawling off from the log. I should think it was forty or fifty feet long !"

Bertha : "Don't go near it !"

Mr. Rukely : "The serpent is the only living thing I feel in duty bound to hate, abhor, and kill !"

He advanced resolutely. Charlotte turned and looked off on the mountain side. Bertha watched her lover tremblingly, while Phœbe stood ready to run and scream.

Mr. Rukely paused, lowering his stick ; the sternness of his features relaxed into a somewhat pallid smile, and he called his companions to advance.

Phœbe : "Is it gone ?"

Bertha : "Have you killed it?"

Mr. Rukely lifted something with his stick. Bertha and Phœbe shrieked simultaneously. Charlotte still looked away.

Mr. Rukely : "I did not know before that log-chains were so formidable!" He dropped the clinking links upon the ground. Bertha drew a long breath, and tried to laugh.

Phœbe, excited : "But there was a snake; I declare I saw one! I'm as sure it moved as I am that I stand here? O, dear!" she added, as the party proceeded further into the woods, "what did we come in here for? These cedars are such hateful things!"

Charlotte : "I think they are beautiful. I love the gloom."

Bertha : "I hope you don't love the mosquitos! I am eaten up by them!"

Mr. Rukely : "It seems to me we are going into a swamp. The air is close and sultry. Shall we turn about?"

Bertha : "There's an ox-path, somewhere, that branches off towards the fields. I believe this is it, though it looks dreadfully wild and lonely!"

Phœbe : "It seems like Sunday, in here! Let's get out of it! Mercy! how I am bitten! O, what noise was that? Seeing that horrid snake makes me nervous as I can be! Every stick is a snake, now; and I have heard a dozen wild-cats since we came in here. You go ahead, Mr. Rukely. We'll follow, if it is to the jumping-off place!"

The party came out upon a high pasture-land. Further on was a deep gulf, defended by impenetrable thick growths of bristling poplars and young spruces, and overhung by a precipitous crag.

Phœbe : "Hurra for a climb, I say! We can see all over creation from up there. Who'll be at the top first?"

Mr. Rukely and Bertha recoiled from the enterprise; but Charlotte, eager to lose herself in any excitement, seconded Phœbe, and the party made the ascent of the crag.

Bertha : "All this part of the mountain was overrun by fire, a few years ago. These rocks were singed, as if for our especial benefit. Look off in the valley now."

Charlotte : "Wonderful!"

Phoebe : " I can see our house ; and there 's Bim driving the cows to water ! They look like so many black ants, and he like a little red one ! "

Mr. Rukely : " The season has been so dry that the country has lost half its beauty. How dead the forests down there appear ! Besides, there is too much smoke in the air to-day. "

Charlotte : " The smoke has a beauty of its own. It gives such a soft blue tint to everything ! How still and sweet the valley lies, in the dim sunshine ! The smoke is the soul of the landscape to-day. "

Bertha : " What a ghastly sky ! The sun is blood-red. Was that thunder ? "

Mr. Rukely : " I see no clouds. Perhaps the money-diggers are blasting again on the Eagle Rocks. "

Phoebe : " I thought I saw Rob Greenwich and Hector ; but it is only a couple of horses fighting flies by the fence. Let 's roll down rocks. Here goes one ! " The missile dropped from ledge to ledge, and leaped among the crackling thickets below. " Did you hear it ? O, Mr. Rukely, help me tumble off this big one ! Where 's a pry ? " picking up a charred sapling. " There, I 've got my hands all black ! Never mind. Give me a lift ! "

Mr. Rukely condescended, and a minute later the loosened rock, toppling on the verge of the cliff, turned lazily at first, then rolled, then bounded, then thundered and plunged, snapping and trampling the brittle poplars, until the noise of its crashing died away in the depths of the gulf.

There was something startling in this invasion of Nature's solitudes with violence and unusual sounds. Phoebe, excited by the sport, detained Mr. Rukely, to set off another flying rock, while Charlotte and Bertha found an easy place of descent, and went down from the crag.

" I hear the trickling of water, " said Charlotte ; " but we can neither reach it nor see it, for the thickets. I am thirsty, and my forehead and hands are parching. "

" The gulf opens below here, " replied Bertha, " and a brook runs out into the maple grove, down yonder. Hark ! There goes another stone ! "

"Happy Phœbe ! see her clap her hands, on the ledge !"

"But, while she laughs, you only sigh, Charlotte. And I sympathize most with you. How I have wanted to be your friend, and to have you mine ! Let us go down into the ravine, here, and be true and free with each other once."

"They are coming !"

"We will hide away from them. O, see where the brook drips over the rocks ! How cool it is down there ! If we can get through the bushes —"

"We can," said Charlotte. "Here is an opening."

"You will fall !" cried Bertha. "Let me hold your hand until you get your foot firmly upon the rock. I've torn my dress ; but we are through the worst of it now. What delicious beds of moss ! The brook is almost dry, and we can go down these rocky steps until we come to the grove."

"Let us sit here, and rest, and bathe our foreheads," replied Charlotte.

"Let me bathe yours for you ! But it is not bathing that will cure the pain. There is a fever which only tears can cool. I know from experience."

"You, Bertha ? You, so fortunate and happy !"

"O, Charlotte, you do not know me ! Fortunate and happy — with this weak, inconsistent heart of mine ! Dear, dear, dear !"

"Hark ! Phœbe is calling us," said Charlotte.

"Do not answer. It is a relief to get away from them for a little while. I want to talk with you."

"My head feels better. How kind you are, Bertha ! There is a magnetism in your hand, that removes the pain."

"It is your tears," said Bertha. "O, if I could be your friend !"

"Bertha, good Bertha — I have not a friend in this wide, wide world ! I know not one, not one whom I can trust."

"Not even me !" said Bertha.

Her sympathy wrought powerfully upon Charlotte, who opened her heart to her more and more, and appeared almost ready to pour out to her the whole history of her life.

Mr. Rukely, from above : "You are pretty truants ! We have called and hunted for you everywhere. It is going to rain."

Bertha : " Will you share our shelter with us ? "

Phoebe : " O le's ! I want to wash the crock off my hands."

Mr. Rukely : " You are responsible if we get wet."

Bertha : " We can go down through the maple grove, then return home by the lower pasture, and avoid the swamp."

Phoebe : " And the mosquitos and snakes ! So le's ! "

" Another time," whispered Bertha, pressing Charlotte's hand.

The party descended through the ravine, stepping upon decayed logs, mossy banks and stones, and rocks encrusted with dry slime. At length the bushes and saplings gave place to the tall trunks of maples and beeches, and, in a convenient spot, they climbed up into the grove.

" Why, how dark it is ! " cried Phoebe. " O, come here ! see through the trees ! What a frightful cloud ! Don't it look awful through the smoke ! I'm glad I an't a Millerite ! Did you hear that gun ? "

Mr. Rukely : " There's somebody hunting, just over the hill."

Phoebe : " I should n't wonder if 't was Robert and Hector. Wait, while I screech ! "

Charlotte, eagerly : " Don't, don't, Phoebe ! Keep still ! "

" Why ? "

" Because, we'll spoil their sport. Besides, I — I don't think it can be Hector. He never shoots."

" He used to, and I bet he would n't object, if Rob Greenwich should coax him ! Rob used to be crazy about hunting, and the squirrels are thick now."

Bertha : " It will do no harm to shout."

" No, no, Bertha ! Let us go back. The darkness frightens me." And Charlotte set out to fly from the grove.

Phoebe : " Here ! where are you going ? That an't the way."

" Tell me, then. Let us hasten ! The storm will be upon us ! "

Mr. Rukely : " We shall get wet, most certainly. What is that ? A shantee ? "

Bertha : " It is a shelter for the men when they work in the sugar-bush. There's the great trough, and the arch for boiling. Shall we go in and wait till the shower passes ? "

The proposition was favorably received by all except Charlotte.

She would have hastened from the woods. But already the big rain-drops began to fall, rattling and hissing among the leaves. Phoebe ran screaming to the shantee, swinging her bonnet in her hand.

"Come, Charlotte," said Bertha. "Why are you afraid? The shower will soon pass; then we will go home together."

"Well, as you please."

"I know now what troubles you, Charlotte. It is what I feared for you. It was almost inevitable. Everybody loves him."

"What do you mean?"

"His voice, his manner, the clear splendor of his face," said Bertha, with a swelling heart; "everything about him fascinates! I pity you!"

"I do not understand — you are speaking of —"

"Hector!"

"From your own experience?" said Charlotte, with feverish interest.

"O, no, — not much! I have known him all my life. I do not think he is a flirt, but he is peculiar; he loves to exert his power, and it is his way to say, and do, and look, the most winning things, without really meaning them. That's the danger. Then, he is so fitful! He keeps one always in suspense. Let me warn you in season."

"There is no need. He is nothing to me, nor ever can be, Bertha. But I thank you for your kind advice, the same."

"There was another gun," cried Bertha, "nearer than before! Let us run. See! Mr. Rukely and Phoebe are already in the cabin."

Charlotte glanced wildly in the direction of the report. At that moment a sudden lightning-flash filled all the woods with an instantaneous fearful glare, and the bursting thunder followed, crashing down the sky, and tumbling from height to height along the mountain range.

XIV.

THE HUNTERS.

TREMBLING and breathless, Charlotte, following her companions reached the shelter just as the descending rain began to rush and rattle among the trees.

"Stand here," cried Phœbe, "and look out when it lightens! How wild and dark the woods are! I'm about three quarters scart!"

Mr. Rukely: "Here are plenty of sap-buckets to sit down upon, if you like. Be careful — the roof slants."

Phœbe: "I give my head an awful tunk, in there! Then I walked backwards and set down in that big iron kittle. I guess my dress will look pretty! Did'n't you hear me yell?"

Charlotte: "I'm afraid of scorpions."

Bertha: "Who ever heard of such a thing?"

Phœbe: "O-o-o! did you see that flash? There come the hunters! It's Hector and Robert, just as I told you. They've got a lot of squirrels!"

"O, Bertha!" whispered Charlotte, "tell me what to do! I cannot meet them! Why did I come in here?"

"Shall I conceal you?"

"O, can you?"

"Get back into the corner. I will sit before you."

"No, I will not be so weak! It must come, — I will meet it now!"

The shantee was dark; and Hector and Robert, entering, did not readily recognize the inmates.

Robert, pulling somebody's bonnet from her face: "This is Phœbe Jackwood. I knew your scream when we were over

the hill. Hello! if you bite, you shall have your teeth taken out."

"You shan't kiss me, Rob Greenwich! If you do —"

"I was n't going to. But I see you'll be disappointed, now, if I don't!"

"Hector! Hector! help!"

Hector: "Fight your own battles. Who is here? Bertha and Charlotte! This is an unlooked-for good fortune."

Mr. Rukely: "You have met with eminent success gunning, I see. You should be proud of those trophies."

Hector threw down his game. "O, to be sure! How glorious are the faculties of man! What divine recreations enchant us! Proud? — I am as proud as poor Tray was, when whipped for keeping bad company."

Robert: "I am the bad company, I suppose. I led poor Tray into wickedness. But, once in, he beat me at my own game. He is two squirrels my superior in cruelty."

Hector: "I did not think that I should ever again take delight in shooting these pretty fan-tails. I had learned to love them in my rambles. They run up the great trunks; they jump from branch to branch; they chatter; they curve their fine tails; they sit and nibble nuts on the high limbs. Is there nothing to win us in all that? Up goes the deadly gun, and this wonderful slender casket, which holds the divine secret of existence, instinct, happiness, falls broken at your feet. There it is; look at it! It is in form the same as ever, but all the ingenuity of murderous man cannot restore the plundered jewel."

Robert: "O, brave and eloquent harangue!"

Hector turned over his game: "Two, four, six, — I killed them all! It is a trifle, perhaps; but such a trifle teaches me that I am no more proof against temptation, than powder is proof against fire; that I am made of the very same stuff with thieves, robbers, and all sorts of ill-doers; and that only circumstance and provocation have been wanting to develop me into as complete a villain as the world knows."

"And what of all this?"

"What of all this? Charity, sir, charity! Give me your

hand, Robert. I can grasp it more heartily than I have been able to do of late. Is there another chief of sinners present? I will embrace him!"

"I declare, Hector Dunbury!" exclaimed Phoebe, "one would think you was crazy!"

"You may think so; but Bertha does not, and Charlotte does not! Excuse me, Robert. I should have introduced you to our friend."

And, with affected formality, Hector went through with the neglected ceremony. Robert bowed with easy politeness. Pale and cold, but outwardly composed, Charlotte acknowledged the salutation.

"This is a romantic spot to make an acquaintance," said he; "but we might have met under stranger circumstances; so let us not stand upon etiquette, but be friends at once. Shall I occupy this bucket by your side?"

Holding her heart with all her might, Charlotte bowed again; and Robert sat down.

"Do not be alarmed," said he, in a significant tone. "Hector insinuates that I am quite a formidable sinner; but we all know him."

"No, you don't!" cried Hector. "And you never will, Robert Greenwich, until we some day quarrel royally, and thenceforward stand to each other for precisely what we are."

"Quarrel! you and I? O, Damon and Pythias!" said Robert, "what do you mean?"

Hector turned to Mr. Rukely. "Explain, if you can, my relation to that good-natured Beelzebub."

Robert, gayly: "This is his peculiar style of joking. He is marvellously funny, if you but understand him. 'Beelzebub' is good!"

"I have no sympathy whatever with his politics, religion, or morals; our spirits are entirely antagonistic; still he holds me, or I him, by a power I cannot comprehend."

Robert laughed immoderately.

"The truth is this: I was with him in days of temptation; I watched over him with a shepherd's care, and brought him every

night, like a tender lamb, into the fold of virtue. Hence the tie between us."

And he turned aside to Charlotte.

"What is he whispering to you?" demanded Hector.

Robert laid his fingers upon Charlotte's arm. "Keep my secret, and I will keep yours!"

Charlotte, with an effort: "You see, my lips are sealed."

Hector regarded her with a questioning look, and turned his head slowly away.

Robert laughed again. "That's another of his jokes, — in his best style! What a glance that was; as much as to say, 'I have warned you; look out for him.'"

Phoebe, impatiently: "Come, do say something sensible! I am sure I can't see any fun in such talk. It don't rain now; let's go out."

Mr. Rukely: "The storm has passed around to the north."

Robert smiled significantly, bending slightly towards Charlotte.

"It has been the way of storms, this season, I am told. They have a northerly tendency; they are attracted by the higher latitudes. Don't you think the Green Mountains delightful, Miss Woods?"

Charlotte's features contracted; she bit her lip, shrinking involuntarily from her tormentor. His keen eye watched her face, while his tongue repeated the question.

"I might think so, if it were not for the snakes!" she answered, in a low tone.

Robert, with an unconscious air: "But our Vermont snakes are quite harmless, if you treat them well."

Bertha: "Harmless as log-chains, Phoebe! Come, the sky is brightening; shall we go? Hector and Robert are expected to be of our party, and take tea with us."

Hector: "We have our squirrels and guns to carry."

Mr. Rukely: "You can send them home in Phoebe's wagon."

Robert: "That will be capital! Shall I have the pleasure of your company, Miss Woods?"

Phoebe, elated: "It all happens just right! Let me carry a gun!"

Hector : "You'll be shooting some one. If you have any regard for human life, Robert, keep your rifle in your hand."

Robert, carelessly : "I'll risk her. Here, my young Amazon, my aspiring Diana ! carry your weapon thus. Shoot whom you please, but do not point the muzzle at me. Hector and Miss Wing will lead the way."

Hector consented reluctantly, and went forward with Bertha. Then followed Mr. Rukely and Phœbe. Robert walked behind, keeping close to Charlotte's side.

"How little did I expect this happiness ! My life ! what good fortune has brought us again together ?"

Charlotte trembled ; but there was something besides fear in the restless down-glance of her eye, and the quivering curve of her lip.

"You were wrong to deceive me as you did," said Robert. "It was like a death-blow, when I lost you. For I had been disinterested and true ; I was your best friend ; I did not merit such ingratitude."

Charlotte turned upon her companion a look of acutest pain. She opened her lips to speak.

"Not that I blamed you ; I did not, in the least," he hastened to say. "You had learned, by bitter experience, to distrust all men. Only I thought you should have known me better. I could not give you up so ; I have spent the summer in search of you ; I have a length and breadth of enduring love, deep in my nature, which nothing can tire or exhaust. It has centred in you, it holds you, it will not let you go !"

Hard and fast breathed Charlotte. She pressed her hand upon her heart. At length, with forced calmness, she spoke.

"It is useless to remind me that I am in your power. I know it. But I do not care much now, — I am ready to meet any shame or disaster. I once thought you noble and generous —"

"But you fled from me !"

"And I would have fled again and again ; but when I saw you last night, a dead despair fell on me. Something has held me. I seem to have been brought here to-day only to meet you !"

"Your better angel overrules your will !"

"Call it what you please," replied Charlotte, in bitter anguish. "I am in your power. I expect no mercy at your hands!"

"Be calm; listen to reason. When I swore to be your friend and protector, I took an oath that I shall keep. All I ask is, that you will consent to see me again, hear my explanation, and try to know me better. I dare not talk now. Hector is suspicious. Promise me that, and you are safe."

Charlotte was about to reply, when the sharp report of a rifle rang through the woods, and some person was seen to fall forward upon the ground.

"It is Mr. Rukely!" cried Robert. "Phœbe has shot him!"

Phœbe stood petrified with consternation. Bertha screamed faintly, and ran to lift her lover up. Hector and Robert reached the spot simultaneously. But Mr. Rukely was too quick for them all.

"That was awfully careless, Phœbe!" he exclaimed, looking very pale and severe.

"I—hoo—hoo—was only seeing if there was a cap on!" stammered Phœbe.

"I heard the lock click," said Mr. Rukely, "and looked to see what the child was doing, when, providentially, I tripped my foot. If I had not stumbled just as I did, I should certainly have been shot through the head. It was a wonderful preservation."

"How could you, Phœbe!" said Bertha.

"You have wasted a charge of powder for me!" exclaimed Robert.

Mr. Rukely, magnanimously: "I forgive her!"

Phœbe, weeping: "I only just pulled up that thing a little, — I thought there was n't any cap on, — and my finger slipped off —"

Mr. Rukely: "Well, well, there's no harm done. Be more careful in future."

Hector flung a sharp reprimand at Robert, for trusting Phœbe with the gun.

"Very good!" laughed the latter. "How many of you heard the bullet?"

Bertha had heard the whistle; so had Hector. On reflection

everybody had heard it whistle and cut the leaves, except Mr. Rukely and Phœbe.

"Now, the joke of the thing is," said Robert, "there was no bullet in the gun! So much for imagination!"

This avowal failed to give general satisfaction, although he was ready to swear to it, and went so far as to explain how it happened that, on the coming up of the shower, he had rammed down a hard wad, in place of a ball. Phœbe's conscience was comforted a good deal, and she declared that she was sure, if there had been a bullet in the gun, she would not have meddled with the lock!

So the party proceeded, Charlotte walking the remainder of the way with Mr. Rukely, while Robert chatted with Phœbe.

Arrived at the house, a lively excitement prevailed, and there arose a clamor of indignation against Robert, on the discovery that Mr. Rukely's hat had two holes in it: one where a bullet had gone in, and another where it had gone out.

"I told you so!" cried Bertha.

Mr. Rukely, with a grim smile: "I though there was no bullet in the gun, Mr. Greenwich!"

Phœbe looked blank. But Robert threw himself upon a chair, and laughed with open throat, declaring that this last was the best joke of all.

"He has no more heart or conscience than a stone," said Hector. "How were you pleased with his conversation," — to Charlotte, aside, — "as you came through the woods together?"

Charlotte changed color: "Why do you ask?"

Hector, regarding her darkly: "Man is a deceiver; woman's heart is soft; and flattery is the snare of souls. Trust not one of us!"

XV.

THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL.

THENCEFORWARD Robert Greenwich frequented Mrs. Dunbury's house with untiring zeal. Hunting, fishing, or riding, he was never without some pleasant excuse for resorting that way. He always inquired for Hector, and feigned disappointment if he did not find him; but it was only when Charlotte was absent that he was ever once known to be in a hurry.

One day, calling as usual, he found Charlotte and Hector sitting together; both silent; the former busy with her needle, the latter engaged in reading random passages in a volume of Shakespeare.

"Under the circumstances," said the visitor, smiling, "I presume you are not very glad to see me."

"If you refer to me," replied Hector, "I am not. I never am. But I suppose that makes no difference. Sit down."

"Thank you for your frankness. I find it quite refreshing. Don't let me interrupt anything, I pray."

"You certainly shall not,"—and Hector went on with his reading.

Robert smiled as he placed his hat on the table, and drew his chair to Charlotte's side. For half an hour they conversed in whispers, with long intervals of silence; and at his departure, she accompanied him to the porch, and talked some minutes with him there.

Returning then to the sitting-room, and finding Hector's book on the floor, she stooped to take it up. He caught her wrist, and held her back. She looked up. The suppressed passion in his face frightened her.

"I thought you had dropped it by accident," she faltered

"I flung it there in a rage! Therefore leave it for my shame and contrition to take it up again." — He pushed it under the table with his foot. — "Lie there," said he, "until I am once more a man!"

All this time he held Charlotte's wrist. Rigid and pale with suffering, she made but a feeble effort to escape.

"Are you an angel or a fiend?" he demanded, searching her face with his determined eye.

"Neither," said she, with tearful pathos; "I am a woman."

"True; I had forgotten," replied Hector. "That name accounts for every inconsistency that entangles our poor human nature! A woman! — Go!"

He dropped her hand. The look he gave her carried a more terrible meaning than his words. He took a number of quick strides across the room; then came and looked upon her. She had not yet spoken; she had sunk down by a chair; her silence and meekness under the blow he had struck burned into his soul like fire.

"Charlotte," said he, after a long pause. He spoke more tenderly, and she began to weep. "Charlotte —" and he stooped to raise her up.

She only bowed more humbly still, until at last her forehead touched his foot.

"Well, if that is your place, this is mine!"

And he threw himself prone upon his face at her side.

"No, no! not there!" she cried, starting quickly up.

He caught the hem of her dress to his lips, and kissed it; but she snatched it from him.

"What are *you*?" she cried out.

"O God! what am I?" he groaned, burying his face in his hands.

"How have I offended you?"

"You have not offended me. I have offended myself! O what a fine blusterer am I!"

"But I have given you some cause — I know I have!"

"Have you? I gather hope from that! Tell me what — afford me an excuse for my rage — and unhorse this imp of conscience that rides me! Come, sit here upon this chair, and we will talk."

"I have not been open and free with you," Charlotte confessed.

"True; but what of that? I have had no claim upon your confidence whatever!"

"Indeed, indeed, you have, sir! No outward claim, perhaps, — and yet a claim — I have felt it, and you have felt it!"

"And so I have! But I thought that was all my egotism! You recognize it? O, Charlotte! if a desperate and all-controlling love can merit anything, I have a claim! Sit still — for now my tongue is loosed, and you must hear me! In spite of myself, in spite of reason and will, I am drawn irrevocably to you. As you are to me, so is all the world. To doubt you is to doubt humanity. The light of the universe shines upon me through your eyes; and if they are turned from me, my soul is dark. Are you frightened, or are you glad, that you tremble so, and hide your face?"

No reply. Hector went on.

"I thought — I believed — I knew — that I was to you all that you were to me. So, I had a claim. And after a long struggle within myself, there came a period of calm and peace. My soul opened its doors to you. But, just then, Robert Greenwich appeared. He cast his shadow between us; and the doors were clashed together as by a whirlwind. Had he been worthy, could I have seen that you belonged to him by the Divine law, — but you know my feeling of that man! Imagine, then, what a burning was lighted within me, when I saw him, with a cool, audacious smile, step in, and gain from you in an hour what is withheld from me to this day!"

"Gain from me — what?"

"That you know, better than I! But I am not blind; I am not deaf. Would that I were! Not once has that fine hypocrite gone out of his selfish track for me. All his visits to this house are visits to you. That first day of your meeting in the woods,

he insinuated himself into your confidence; I saw it at the time; since then there have been manifold secrets between you. I have marked his assumption, which you have endured, if not encouraged. I have marked your blushes, your pallor, your faltering speech, when he has come suddenly upon you, or given you meaning looks, or whispered in your ear. With the interest I feel in you, and the scorn I have for him, can you wonder at the fury stirred in my blood? To-day, the tiger was roused, and would have sprung at his throat."

"I do not wonder; I am to blame!" uttered Charlotte.

"O, woman! woman! I loved you, and tried to hate you. I believed you worthy, and believed you not worthy. To my understanding you appeared false and erring; but ever in my heart you were fair, white-robed, pure, angelic! O, how I loved you, when I was most unkind! Charlotte, did I deserve your trust?"

"You did — you did! But your friendship was too precious to me; I could not bear to lose it: my fear kept me dumb: so, I left you to misjudge me."

"Show me how I misjudged you."

"Let me sit by the window; I cannot breathe here," said Charlotte. "I will tell you everything to-day. This agony must have an end. I know you will cast me from you — but it will be better so. Be patient; I must collect my thoughts a little."

Hector trembled with suspense. He led her to a seat by the window, and, placing himself beside her, took her cold hands in his.

"Speak boldly!" said he, in quivering tones. "If I am true, no misfortune, no fault, no dark spot in the past, can stain you in my sight. Your soul is what I love. It matters little what garments it has worn, if it be clothed in white to-day. The true man looks through every external circumstance, to the spiritual substance under all. Only the weak and ignorant regard birth, fortune, family, reputation —"

At that moment, the door opened. Mrs. Dunbury entered, smiling benignly.

"Do I intrude?" she asked, hesitating.

"You do," said Hector, gently, but with something like a frown. "Leave us alone a few minutes — if you please."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Dunbury. "I am afraid you will take cold by that window, Charlotte. There is quite a chill air to-day."

She stooped to take up Hector's book; he followed her with an impatient eye; when, having turned again, to smile her satisfaction at the aspect of affairs, she deliberately withdrew.

Then Hector moved impulsively to the door, and turned the key in the lock.

XVI.

FIGHTING FIRE.

It was a new thing for Hector to be closeted with Charlotte. His mother augured favorably from the circumstance, and waited with hopeful interest for the termination of the interview.

The hour seemed long: but at length, with a thrill of motherly solicitude, she heard the sitting-room door open, and Hector come forth. He was passing through the hall, when she hastened to intercept him.

“Hector!” — she started with alarm — “are you ill?”

There was a desperate trouble in his pale face; he did not glance aside, or turn his head, but, putting her off with a feeble gesture, as she followed him, hurried from the house. Excited with fresh fears, Mrs. Dunbury made haste to find Charlotte. She entered the sitting-room. All was still; she saw no one; but presently a low moan directed her attention to a large arm-chair, before which lay Charlotte like one dead, with her face upon the floor, hidden in the scattered masses of her hair.

“My child! what is this?” She lifted her up; she put back the curls from her temples; she kissed her, and called her endearing names. But the poor girl only moaned, and strove to prostrate herself again upon the floor. Then, more than ever alarmed, but fearing more for Hector than for her, Mrs. Dunbury threw on hastily her bonnet and shawl, and walked out in the direction he had been observed to take.

It was another smoky day. The drouth had continued; Autumn had crept unawares in the dry path of Summer; the hills were prematurely brown, the forests sere and dead, and the sun looked like blood in the sky.

A few days before, in the anticipation of rain, Mr. Dunbury had ventured to set fire to some obstinate stumps on the borders of a swamp, west of the creek. Again, as usual that summer, all signs had failed; the rain came not; the earth was dried to tinder; and the fire spread in every direction. The men fought against its inroads, with water and spades; drenched it, quenched it, smothered it in dirt; killed it, cried victory, and left it for dead a dozen times. But it had the blind mole's instinct for digging in the earth. It ate off the roots of trees, and brought them down crashing in the dry swamp. It devoured the soil itself; it ran in the grass like snakes; and was continually watching its opportunity to dodge into the fences, or to insinuate itself into the balsam pump-logs, piled up on the edge of the swamp.

It had shown itself again that afternoon, leaping up, flushed and exultant, in a spot where least expected. Its fantastic dancing and clapping of hands had of course been speedily checked, and it now lay humbled in dust and ashes; but columns of smoke, arising from the burnt ground, marked the scene of the conflict.

Mrs. Dunbury thought she discerned Hector working with his father, in the midst of the smoke. In her uncertainty, she spoke to Corny, who was filling barrels with water, at the creek.

"Yis, that's him," drawled Corny. "I d'n' know what we should done without him; for he beats all creation to work, when he gits a little grain riled."

"What do you mean by riled?"

"Wal, he was goin' by, when me an' Mist' Dunbury was runnin' to put out the fire; and Mist' Dunbury told him to go an' help, — kinder cross, I thought, an' I guess he thought so too, for he did n't say nothin'; but the way he put in when he got to the fire was a caution, you may as well believe! Darned if I could do anything but stan' an' look on!"

"Well, fill the barrels; they will want the water."

"I am fillin' 'em. — There! what in thunder was I thinkin' on? They tumbled off 'm the sled, when I turned the hoss 'round, and I've been 'n' filled one 'ithout puttin' it on agin!"

"Place the other on the sled, and dip the water from this one into it," said Mrs. Dunbury.

"Wal, I did n't think o' that. It 'll take a good while, t'sides If Bridget 'u'd come and help, we could lift it on."

At this moment Mr. Dunbury shouted, "Make haste!"

"An't I makin' haste all I kin!" muttered Corny. — "He 'll be mad as thunder, now, if he sees me pourin' water from one barrel into t' other."

He accordingly exercised his ingenuity in the matter, and turned the horse partly around, to place him as a screen between him and his two barrels and Mr. Dunbury and his two eyes. After that he emptied barrel number one into barrel number two; and, discovering that the contents of barrel number one did not much more than half fill barrel number two, paused to philosophize on the subject; when Mrs. Dunbury advanced the hypothesis that there was an outlet somewhere. In fact, barrel number two leaked like a sieve. By this time Mr. Dunbury was shouting again. "Hurry with what you've got!"

"Wa-a-al! I won't fuss no longer," said Corny, taking the reins. "There an't much of it, so I can ride."

He jumped upon the sled, and, to save the wasting contents of the barrel, struck the horse with the reins. The animal failed, however, to keep pace with the leak: while he only walked, the water was running: and by the time the scene of excitement was reached, barrel number two was empty.

"I done jest as ye told me to!" screamed Corny.

Out of respect for Mr. Dunbury's length of arm, he dodged behind the barrel, which was overturned between them, and stepped back into a bed of hot ashes, up to his knees.

Made aware of her husband's excitement by the united witness of her eyes and ears, but feeling it still more in her wounded spirit, Mrs. Dunbury's heart failed her, and, giving a last anxious look at Hector, as he disappeared in the smoke, she returned slowly to the house.

An hour later, Bridget blew the horn, and Mr. Dunbury and Corny came up to supper. They were covered with sweat and soot; and the brow of the farmer was dark and angry.

"Where is Hector?" asked the invalid, anxiously.

"He is in the swamp."

"Is n't he coming to supper?"

"It was necessary for some one to watch the fire."

"I offered to," said Corny, blacking a towel with his half washed face, "but he said he'd stay; so I tho't I'd let him, if he could see any fun in 't."

After supper, Corny was sent to take Hector's place; but he returned, not long after, and made his appearance, whittling.

"Where is Hector?" asked Mrs. Dunbury again.

"He's out there."

"But you were told to watch the fire!"

"Wal, he said he'd watch it. B'sides, the fire's all under now, and he could leave it's well as not, if he was a mind to."

Mrs. Dunbury then went to the garden where her husband was at work, and expressed to him something of her fears for Hector. "Would it not be well to speak to him yourself?" she ventured to say.

"And go down on my knees to him?" added her husband, with a lurid look.

"O, no, not that, but you know his spirit; he cannot forget a wrong; an unjust or unworthy word corrodes his very heart."

Mr. Dunbury made no reply, but kept on husking the garden corn, and throwing the ears into the basket. His face was red and angry; and, with her knowledge of his moods, she judged it wise to leave him. It was now fast growing dark, and as a last resort she sent Bridget with a message to her son.

But the evening dragged on, and still Hector did not appear. Under the wide canopy of smoke that burdened the night air and hid the stars, he sat upon a fallen trunk, in the midst of the black field. The subtle element was "under," as Corny had declared; but, though crushed, it was not killed: angry eyes starting out now and then, and winking redly in the dark, betrayed its lurking life. No other object was visible on any side, far or near, save the darker shadows of the swamp, contrasting dimly with the misty gloom of the fields.

There was something deeply solemn in the scene. To Hector, it seemed typical of his own soul.

In the night of despair by which he was encompassed, he

saw no light, no glimmer anywhere, save in the quivering embers of a deep-burning passion, which he had trampled beneath his feet. Nor was the correspondence destroyed, when, looking to the eastward, he beheld a startling apparition in the sky. It was of two blood-red spectres, flickering and glowing like fragments of the moon in flames. He knew that the phenomenon was caused by fires on the high mountain-top; but his distempered fancy could see only two grotesque and awful eyes gazing upon him out of heaven, and symbolizing the still more awful eyes of conscience in his soul.

The night wore on. The giant eyes blinked sleepily. The embers in the ground twinkled, and shifted from place to place, like electric sparks. The leaves rustled in the swamp, the night-wind moaned in the trees. Then came a snapping and crackling of roots, a stir in the air, a murmur and a whisper overhead, followed by a deep, hoarse whistle, swelling to a roar, and a resounding crash in the blind woods. The earth shuddered, and dull echoes smote the hills. A tree had fallen. Still Hector sat and watched; and now, while his limbs became chilled with the cold, his thoughts grew wild and hideous. He imagined himself surrounded by vast pits of smouldering fire. Then it seemed that the world had been destroyed, and that he was the sole survivor of his race, brooding upon the ruins. All the people he had ever known moved past him in grimacing and solemn procession. They were but as phantoms, that had never had a real existence. The life he had lately lived was something vague and visionary, and far-off in the past; his own bodily form seemed strange to him; and he wondered at the gigantic proportions of the being that seemed himself. Suddenly, all this passed, and he saw one sole, clear image, as of purest amber, exquisitely soft and glorious, falling, falling forever, in a chaotic sky. It was the image of Charlotte.

He knew not whether these fancies ended in sleep; but when his mind aroused to consciousness again, the mountain fires had faded, and the dawn was faintly struggling through the dim smoke that shrouded the world.

XVII.

THE MORNING AFTER.

ALL night long Mrs. Dunbury listened for Hector's footsteps in the hall ; and it was not until after she had heard him enter at day-break, and go up to his chamber, that slumber overtook the thronging troubles of her brain.

She was awakened by a knock at her door.

" Who is there ? "

Hector entered. He was pale and haggard.

" O, my son ! " said she, reaching out her hands from her pillow, " come here ! What a night I have passed ! "

" What a night *I* have passed, mother ! "

" What have you been doing ? "

" Fighting fire. "

" But they told me there was no fire to fight. "

" Ah, but there was fire to fight ! " — and Hector laid his hand upon his breast. " Where is father ? "

" I think he has gone in search of you. He was awake all night ; and as soon as it was beginning to grow light, he arose and went out. "

" That is well. When he returns, please inform him that I leave town to-day. "

" Leave town ! "

" Temper your surprise, mother, and listen to me a moment. "

" But you must not think of it ! " and Mrs. Dunbury held her son's hand with spasmodic energy. " It will kill me to have you go ! "

" It will kill me to stay, mother ! "

" But reflect — "

"I have had all night to reflect; and I must go. Life here can be but one prolonged distress. O, mother, what stuff mortality is made of! But a little time ago, the golden summer was all before me; now it is all behind me. What was happiness is dust; what was hope is ashes! My brain is unsettled, and I need solitude."

"I pity you, my son!"

"None of your pity! Rise up rather, like a Spartan mother and charge me to be a man! My destiny is not yet fulfilled. Have no fears for my welfare. There is no danger for me, except in resting here, to shrivel and wither up before my time."

"But Charlotte —"

Hector pressed his forehead in his hand, as if to hold it from bursting.

"Think of her!"

"O, God! were it possible not to think of her!" A sigh shook his whole frame, and his voice was torn with anguish, like his heart. "But I will not be weak. Let me make one last request, mother. Do you know her whom we call Charlotte?"

"I think I do; I think she is a pure and good girl —"

"Think? O, mother!" — and there was a bright earnestness in Hector's eyes, — "I could tell you a story! — To pass through what she has passed through! — O, we have never known her!"

"I felt that, — I felt it all!"

"Then you should be ashamed to have said 'I think.' For my sake, cherish her with the tenderest care; comfort her in suffering, be her friend at all times, and, happen what will, never forsake her!"

"But you — why do you desert her? why leave her at all?"

"Let that rest where it does — between her and me alone. If you knew all, then you would understand; then you would say, 'You do well to go.' — Destiny is strange — strange!"

The entrance of Mr. Dunbury interrupted the conference.

"It is a surprise to see you, sir," he said, with a somewhat surly look at Hector.

"If that surprise could have been postponed some minutes longer, I should not be sorry. But, since you are here, I may as

well deliver the message I was about to leave for you. And Hector named his proposed journey.

"Very well," said Mr. Dunbury, doggedly. "I suppose that what I said yesterday has decided you."

"What you said nettled me ; for I was sore from head to heel, when you hit me so rudely with your speech. But that is passed with me, — I hope it is passed with you. I am grieved, not that you addressed me as you did, but that you, my father, could find it in your heart to address any one in such terms. I say this in all kindness, and with due respect ; but I have of late fallen into the habit of plain speaking."

Mr. Dunbury looked fiery ; but whether from self-conviction or resentment, Hector did not know.

"I leave to-day ; and only Heaven knows when I shall return, — if ever ! I have spent a happy summer with you here. You have been at most times a father to me ; you, mother, have been always more than a mother. I thank you both ! That I have not been worthy, I know too well, — too well ! I am by nature imperious and self-willed, fitful and rash, and I have too often given rein to this wild horse of temper. You, dear mother, can forgive all that, and a thousand times more ! I hope you, my father, will forgive so much. Let me kneel here until I hear you say so."

Hector got down by the bed, and hid his face. The invalid pressed his noble head, and kissed his fair, flowing locks, sobbing audibly. For more than a minute, Mr. Dunbury looked on in rigid silence. Then his chest began to heave, and his lips to quiver, and a glistening moisture quenched the flame of his eyes. After two or three attempts, which pride appeared to foil, he stooped and took Hector by the arm.

"Arise up now," — his voice and manner betrayed emotion struggling still with pride. "I — I do not like to see you so. You know I forgive you. Then let us be men, and talk and act like men."

"Except we be first as little children, we can never be true men," said Hector, kneeling still.

There was love, and suffering, and an indescribable softness in

his tones, which troubled the parent's rugged spirit more and more. Mrs. Dunbury wept aloud. Then Hector reached forth instinctively, and took his father's hand. For a moment, there was a terrible boiling and swelling of the restrained waters; then the ice gave away, and they gushed forth. The strong man was broken; he sank down by the bed; he threw himself on Hector's neck; he cried out, in agony,

"I am the only offender; I am not fit to live!"

"O, my father!" said Hector, "my father! my father!"

The invalid wept still; but a deep happiness stirred under all her grief, and sweetened her bitterest tears.

On leaving his mother's room, Hector passed an hour in his own chamber, making preparations for his journey. Then returning and finding her alone, and busily engaged in preparing some little comforts to remind him of her in his absence, he bent over her tenderly, and took her hand.

"Put away those trifles," said he, with a sad smile. "It pains me to see you strain your eyes, working for an ungrateful son!"

"Anything I can do for you is a solace to my pain," replied his mother, blinded once more by her tears.

"But there is something of deeper importance, and of dearer interest, that you can do for me now. I find I cannot go without saying one last word to Charlotte. I wish to feel that she understands me, and forgives me."

"O, why did you not tell me this before?"

"Why before, and why not now?"

"Charlotte! Charlotte!" — a fresh distress choked the invalid's voice, — "she is gone!"

Blank disappointment sent the color from Hector's face. He repeated — "Gone!"

'Half an hour since. I could not detain her longer. O, how she loves you! how she suffers, Hector! She would have gone out wildly into the world last night, — anywhere, to meet any fate, to die; but my entreaties prevailed, and she remained. But this morning I could not move her. She

believed that it was her presence here that drove you from your home — ”

“ Which way did she go ? ”

“ To Mr. Jackwood’s ; it was by my advice ; I sent Cornelius with her.”

“ It is well ! ” said Hector. “ After I am gone, send for her, — she cannot but come back to you. Perhaps it is better that I should not see her again. Tell her — tell her — to think kindly of me ; and — that ’s all.”

His mother sobbed. He stooped and kissed her. “ Bless you, bless you, mother ! ” Then, returning to his chamber, he hastened to make final preparations for his journey.

XVIII.

PARTINGS.

STRANGE sensations crowded Charlotte's heart, as Corny set her down at Mr. Jackwood's gate. The hens cackled as of old; Rover ran out, barking, and leaped upon her dress; and the rising generation of turkeys saluted her with a clamor of comically juvenile voices. Then Bim cried hello, with a good-natured grin; and Phœbe appeared, clapping her hands delightedly.

"You've come to stop a week, I know, have n't you?" cried the young girl. "And, only think, gran'ma is going back to Sawney Hook, to-day, and we are all tickled to death! But don't you tell her you're going to stay; for it'll make her so mad, I don't know but she'd give up going, just to bother us; she's so everlasting ugly — if I do say it!"

Mrs. Jackwood dropped her "flat" upon the kitchen table, where she was ironing a Rigglesly cap, and met Charlotte smilingly at the door; while the elder Abimelech, who was engaged in tinkering the old lady's trunk on the inside (her travelling trunk, of course), put his head out and reached over, — after rubbing his fingers on his trousers, — to shake hands with the visitor.

"Here's our Cha'lotte, gran'mother!"

The old lady, bending painfully over a basin at the stove, occupied in washing out the Good Samaritan in a little dab of suds, looked up with a faint simper of recognition.

"O, how d'e do?" — she pulled her shawl about her neck, with the tips of her wet fingers, as if she felt a draft of air from somewhere in the direction of Charlotte. "Ye ben well?"

Charlotte had been quite well; and how was Mrs. Rigglesly?

"O, 't an't o' much consequence about me! Still, it's perlite to ask, I s'pose. I an't a bit well. I never be, late years. Slavin' for my childern's wore my constitution all down to nothin'. An' sence the day I got my feet wet in that 'ere plaguy boat, I've ben wus'n ever. I've the terrible-est crickin' pain from my left ear all the way down my shoulder to the small o' my back; nobody knows nothin' 't all what I suffer with 't, an more 'n all that, I don't suppose nobody cares."

And, dropping a silent tear in the dish of suds, she went on squeezing the Good Samaritan, snuffing and sighing audibly.

"Gran'mother's goin' to quit us to-day," said Mr. Jackwood, "an' I'm sure I don't know how we're goin' to git along without her!"

"O, I shan't be missed! I'm nothin' but a burden, seems, in some places! I got a darter down to Sawny Hook, — that's one comfort, — an' if she's half as glad to see me as other folks be to git red on me, I shall be thankful. I got this 'ere han'some han'kerchi'f," — wringing out the Good Samaritan, — "to make a present on 't to one o' the childern; but there han't neither on 'em desarved it, an' I don't see but I shall haf to carry it back to give to some o' Dolly's folks, arter all."

Phœbe, in an under tone: "They're welcome to the old thing, for all me! For my part, I shall be glad to see the last on 't."

Old lady: "What's that gal mutterin'? Come, empty out these suds, an' gi me some rensin' water, can't ye? I want to git the han'kerchi'f to dryin', so 's 't we won't haf to put off iron-in' on 't till the very last thing. I'm afeard I shan't be able to git away to-day, arter all."

At this alarming suggestion, Phœbe sprang, with alacrity, to do the old lady's bidding. In her haste, she bespattered Abimelech and Corny, who were approaching the kitchen door.

"Here!" cried Bim; "that's smart! Guess ye better look! Firin' yer darned old suds all over a feller!"

"Bim'lech!" said Mr. Jackwood; "what's that?"

"Wal, she might ta' care! I'll git a hull dipper full, and fire back, next time!"

Mr. Jackwood : " There, there, you 're a terrible injured boy What does Corny want ? "

Corny, soberly : " I come perty nigh fergittin' my errant, arter all. I 'd got started for hum 'fore I thought Mr. Dunbury said I might leave the buggy, an' hitch on to your one-hoss wagon, if you can spare 't 's well 's not. Hector 's goin' away, an' we want to take his trunks over to town. "

" Hector going ! " echoed Phœbe. " Not to stay, is he ? "

" I don't s'pose he 'd take his trunks if he was comin' right back Mabby Charlotte knows. "

" Why, you never spoke of it, Charlotte ! "

Old lady : " I should n't think community 'd mourn much ! He 's the sa'ciest young man, — an' so disagreeable ! jest like his daddy, for all the world, tho' I don't know 't he drinks. "

Mr. Jackwood : " He 's dre'ful smart, though. I alluz got along with Hector. 'Bout the wagon, Corny, — I dono'. We got to go over with gran'mother, some time this forenoon. "

Bim, brightly : " She might ride with Mr. Dunbury's folks. "

" I guess 't won't be wuth while for me to go at all, if it 's goin' to make so much fuss. As for ridin' with them 'ere Dunburys — "

And, giving the Good Samaritan a revengeful twist and shake, the old lady hung him before the stove to dry, with an air which sufficiently expressed her sentiments on that subject.

Mrs. Jackwood, whose wits were sharpened by the bare thought of the old lady's being detained, proposed that Mr. Dunbury should have the wagon, and take aboard her big trunk, in passing ; and that the old lady herself should be transported, with her lesser baggage, in the buggy. Corny thought this arrangement would suit " fust-rate, " and accordingly took his departure.

" I 'm real glad ! " said Phœbe ; " for Hector 'll have to stop, and we can bid him good-by, can't we, Charlotte ? "

The Jackwood family worked industriously. Mrs. Jackwood assisted in packing the trunk and doing up bundles, while Phœbe flat-ironed the Good Samaritan with a vengeance. For the first time in his life, Bim showed a disposition to do something for the old lady ; and Rover, impressed with the spirit of the household,

took it into his head to facilitate business by running away with her shoe.

At length all was ready; and Mrs. Rigglesly, in her black bombazine, with her bonnet and cloak on, and her shawl about her neck, sat cooking her feet in the stove-oven, and sipping a cup of boiling-hot tea. A quiet glee inspired Phœbe, and Bim manifested a naughty inclination to dance a hornpipe under the stoop.

"I believe I've got everything aboard," observed Mr. Jackwood, looking serious as possible.

"I suppose you're in a hurry to git me off!" sighed the old lady. "Wal, you won't be troubled with me agin very soon. Is my luncheon in the bag? I wish there'd ben a bit of cold ham to go long with it; but never mind. Take this hot brick, Bim'leeh."

"Bim'leeh!" said Mr. Jackwood, in a suppressed voice, "quit your laughin'!"

"I was in hopes that lyin' pedler'd be this way agin, 'fore I went. If he ever does show his face here, I hope you'll give him a sound blessin', among ye, and git back the money he swindled me out of, for them shoes. — There, if you han't dropped that brick!"

Abimelech, chagrined: "I could n't help it, it's so tarnal hot!"

Old lady: "And you've broke it, I do declare! I might knowed you would! You are the carelesssest child —"

Mr. Jackwood: "Never mind. We'll make this answer till we git to the village, and take along another to heat at the tavern."

Old lady, moving: "O, dear, I'm down sick! I'm no more fit to be trav'lin' 'n I be to fly; but I s'pose I must go. Tuck my shawl up around my neck a little, Betsy."

Mr. Jackwood, cheerily: "Step right up in the chair, gran'-mother! Hold the hoss, Bim'leeh."

Old lady, very desponding: "I don't, for the life of me, see how I'm ever goin' to git 'way up in that high buggy! O, ho, hum! Don't le' me slip! Hold the chair, somebody! Here, Betsy, gi' me your shoulder. Who ever see sich an awk'ard

thing to git into! O!" — with a sudden scream, — "that crick in my back! it's killed me! O, dear!"

Mr. Jackwood: "There you be, mother! You'll find that an easy seat to ride on. How's your back now?"

"O, wal, — 't won't trouble nobody much longer, that's some consolation! If I only live to git to Sawney Hook, I shall have reason to be thankful. My umbrel', Phoebe! I thought everything was ready."

The umbrella was at hand. Phoebe passed it up with her good-by.

"I s'pose that means good riddance!" muttered grandmother Rigglesy. "There han't none on ye kissed me."

Mrs. Jackwood, to facilitate matters, gave the example; Phoebe following with an expeditious smack.

Bim, aside to Charlotte: "I'm darned glad I an't no taller!"

Old lady: "Come, sonny! Ye han't ben a bit good boy sence I ben here; but I'll kiss ye."

Bim, reluctantly: "Can't reach up!"

Mr. Jackwood: "Come, boy, we're waitin' for ye; git up in the chair. Kiss your gran'mother."

Bim stepped up; made a wry face; received a kiss; and, getting down, with a violent scowl, scoured his lips on his sleeve as he went to open the gate.

So the modern Eve rode out of Paradise in Mr. Dunbury's buggy. Like our first parents, on a like occasion,

"Some natural tears she shed, but wiped them soon;"

the Good Samaritan being brought freshly into service after Phoebe's ironing.

"Sick 'em, Rove!" said Bim, recklessly, as the fussy shawl and hated bombazine passed through the gate, with the faded cotton umbrella spread against the wind.

Rover barked; Phoebe skipped and sang; and Mrs. Jackwood's genial face looked smiling as a landscape after a long rain. But it was all a weary pantomime to Charlotte, whose sad eyes beheld the departure from the kitchen window.

Scarce had the gloomy umbrella disappeared, when Mr. Dunbury drove by with Hector.

"Why, if they han't gone and forgot gran'mother's trunk!"

And Phœbe ran out, bareheaded, screaming at the top of her voice. This was the first intimation Mr. Dunbury had received with regard to extra baggage, Corny having naturally forgotten to do his errand.

"You was going without bidding anybody good-by, too!" cried Phœbe. "Did n't ye know Charlotte was here? Wait; I'll tell her, — she'll come out."

Ah! there were two hearts that throbbed strangely, at those words! Happy Phœbe, who knew nothing of the agony of either

Charlotte had fled to Mrs. Jackwood's room. Her face was bowed and hidden.

"Why!" cried Phœbe; "why don't you come? He's waiting."

"Say good-by for me, Phœbe. It will be the same to him."

"How you act, Charlotte! You han't been a bit like yourself to-day! What ails you?"

"Do leave me, good Phœbe!" pleaded Charlotte.

Phœbe complied reluctantly. By this time Mr. Dunbury, with Bim's powerful assistance, had loaded up the old lady's trunk, and made all ready for a start.

"She won't come," said Phœbe. "I guess she thinks you don't want to see her. I wish you'd go in a minute; but I s'pose you won't. What shall I tell her for you?"

A swelling grief in Hector's heart choked back the little message he would have sent. Yet he shook hands with Phœbe, and smiled upon her April tears, and expressed a kindly wish at parting; and so rode off, outwardly calm, but with the insupportable thought burning and aching in his soul, that the tragic curtain had fallen, to darken henceforth between him and her he loved, forever.

XIX.

THE DOVE AND THE SERPENT.

IN its better moments, the soul looks with clear vision upon the confused drama of life, and sees use and meaning everywhere. Wisdom and beauty shift the scenes. The tragic and comic unite in holy marriage, bringing alternate laughter and tears, joy and trial, and love, and mighty sorrow, to the development and expansion of man's entire nature.

But there are times when, from the shock of some terrible experience, we grope, stunned and blinded, amid the ruins of happiness, and believe ourselves the mere playthings of chance. It was so with Charlotte now. What this last great trial was for, she could not divine. How like a dream it all appeared! Here she was again in Mr. Jackwood's house: life then was the same as it had been a few short months before: but, in the interim, what an existence had she lived!

Mrs. Dunbury sent early for Charlotte to return to the shelter of her abode. But she could not go back there. Hector's home could not be her home. Where he had lived, she could not be at rest. Nor could her spirit find peace with her old friends.

"Do you recollect," said Phoebe, "the day when Mr. Dunbury called to borrow our wagon, and told us Hector was coming home? How long ago it seems! Does it to you? Everybody thought, one time, he was paying attention to you; and I expected, much as could be, you'd be married. O, do you remember the stone he gave me for a keepsake, the day you ketched me asleep by the fence?" And Phoebe, running to her closet, and taking out the cobble, rolled it upon the floor. "It's like men's hearts, he said, and told me to look at it whenever I was in danger of falling in

love. An't he the queerest mortal you ever see? But I think he's splendid! — don't you? There's Bertha Wing, and I don't know how many others, would give their eyes to git him. I know I would," said Phœbe, frankly. "But this summer he never appeared to care for anybody but you. Maybe you might 'a got him, — don't you suppose you might, if you had tried?"

One afternoon, Phœbe came running to Charlotte, in high glee.

"You can't think who's come! My heart almost hopped out of my mouth when I saw him ride up."

Charlotte started, as Hector's image flashed momentarily before her.

"How does my hair look?" cried Phœbe. "Come up stairs; I'll put on my de-laine dress. Mother! ask him into the setting-room. There's his knock!"

Ah! too well poor Charlotte knew that knock; and it was needless now for the excited Phœbe to whisper, "It's Robert Greenwich!"

"I wonder if he knows you are here!" said Miss Jackwood, closing the chamber door. "Though I'm sure he's come to see me! You would n't be surprised, if you knew half the things he said to me the other day. Will you hook my dress? How nervous I be! Don't you like Robert? What a splendid moustache he wears!"

Charlotte assisted her friend to arrange her dress; and, in return, Phœbe generously invited her to go down and share the visitor with her.

"No, I thank you," said Charlotte. "If he has called to see you, I should be an intruder."

The idea flattered Phœbe; and she had no wish to urge the point. Having taken a last critical glance at her beauty in the glass, and given her "beau-catchers" a final polish, she descended alone, simpering and blushing, to charm the smitten Robert.

The visitor staid nearly an hour; during which time, at his suggestion, Charlotte was twice invited to the sitting-room. But she persisted in her determination, and at length the foiled hypocrite took his leave.

"O, I had such a nice chat!" exclaimed Phœbe, running up stairs. "Say, he's coming again! Have I got pretty eyes?"

"Did he tell you so?"

The elated child smiled at herself in the glass, and put on self-complacent airs.

"O, I an't going to tell! If he did, I suppose it was in fun. He talked ever so much about you, and asked how long you are going to stay here, and whether you correspond with Hector. He said I need n't mention it to you; but I did n't promise. Would you care if he thought I was handsomer than you?"

Charlotte smiled. "I should not be at all displeased, my dear Phœbe!"

Phœbe, affectedly: "I don't say he does, you know. If he said so, he probably didn't mean it. His moustache is perfectly bewitching, any way!"

Charlotte ventured to utter a few gentle words of warning against the fascinations of that gay moustache. But Phœbe would not listen to reason.

"Hector was jealous of Robert, and prejudiced you against him, or else you would n't speak so. How old should you think he was? Not over twenty-four, is he? I shall be seventeen next July."

So Phœbe chatted, on the same delicious theme, all that day, the next, and the day after. On the third day, Robert came again. This time he brought his sister Etty, the genius; by which stratagem he managed to compel Charlotte's presence, engage her in conversation, and make Phœbe jealous. The latter showed a good deal of spite towards her innocent friend; but when the visitors had gone, Charlotte talked with her so unselfishly and kindly, showing her what a little fool she was, that she gave vent to her vexation in a shower of tears, embraced her companion, asked her forgiveness, and felt better.

On the following day, Robert took the girls by surprise, as they were walking together by the creek.

"Who would have thought I should be here again so soon?" he cried, gayly. "Is an excuse necessary?"

"O, no!" said Phœbe.

"Then I wish my excuse would keep until another time. But the truth is, I left a pair of gloves here yesterday."

Phoebe: "I have n't seen any. What kind of gloves?"

Robert entered upon a grave and minute description of the articles in question, expressing his conviction that they were on the mantel-piece, under the clock; and it was expected of Phoebe to go and find them.

"You'll wait for me here?"

"Certainly. Go quick! If you don't find them under the clock, look under the bureau; if they are n't there, hunt for 'em in the barn. — The goose!" laughed Robert; "see her run!"

Charlotte, indignantly: "It's wicked to deceive her so!"

"Then love will have many sins to answer for. Every artifice seems right by which I get near you."

"But you have made her believe you love her!"

"The ninny! did she tell you so? But why so angry? I wish I could think 't was jealousy; then I should have some hopes. But we have no time to quarrel. The simpleton will be back presently, — unless she breaks her neck, as I devoutly pray she may! Have you heard from Hector?"

A shadow swept over Charlotte's face.

"How should I hear from him? Why do you ask?"

"Because — I have heard from him!"

Charlotte started. The villain smiled, showing the edge of his white teeth under his moustache.

"I had a letter this morning. It was written on board the ship *Excelsior*, bound for California. Would you like to see it?"

She did not speak; she kept her large, intense eyes fixed upon a willow-twig she turned swiftly round and round in her fingers.

"Indifferent, are you?" Again Robert's teeth showed their white points beneath his moustache. "He mentions your name — shall I tell you what he says?"

Faster still beat Charlotte's heart; faster still she twirled the willow-twig. Robert opened a letter, and read.

"'I had a queer experience with that girl, Rob. But it is all over now. The spell is broken. I was a great fool, where you would have been a great villain!' Complimentary to me, as ever

you see! Still, he can't do without me. He invites me to meet him in San Francisco."

The light of Robert's eye, and the glitter of his teeth, became lynx-like, as he watched her. Her restless fingers dropped the twig. He stooped to pick it up; but she put her foot upon it.

"Show me that letter!"

"So, you have changed your mind? Here it is. But, since you declined it before, you shall give me a kiss for it now."

"Give me the letter!" and down went Charlotte's little foot upon the grass.

Robert laughed impudently, but she kept her eyes on his, and held out her commanding hand.

"The kiss!" said Robert.

"I would not give you that for fifty letters, with fifty fortunes, each with fifty slaves like you!"

"I like your temper! Here, — take the letter!" But Robert knew she would not have it then. She had turned her back upon him scornfully. "At least, tell me if you have any message to send to Hector," — and he held her arm.

"Let me go!" she cried, with haughty mien. "Your touch makes me shudder! Is not that enough?"

"You speak very plainly!" said Robert.

"So I can afford to speak. I have feared to offend you heretofore, because it has been in your power to crush me."

"Has been?" repeated Robert, significantly.

"Has been, — and is; but I do not care much now. Come what will, I am ready to meet it."

The impure flame in Robert's eyes could not endure the light of her clear orbs. He shivered from head to foot.

"You are a noble girl," he muttered, stifling the rage that stung him. "But you wrong me; and it is my fault, perhaps. I have not said to you what I would say, because you would never hear me. It is from no mean motive that I follow you; I am true and sincere; I would make you my wife."

As Charlotte looked upon him, her whole form seemed to undulate and expand with emotions that swelled up from the depths of her injured soul.

"A generous offer What more you could have said, I do not know! I thank you! Still, suffer me to be true. My entire nature shrinks at the thought of giving myself to one I do not love. By no law, human or divine, can I ever, ever be yours. So I have the same answer for you I had before. You may be vindictive, or you may be generous: I have been true: I have no more to say."

Robert was astounded.

"Stop!" he aspirated, — "Charlotte!"

Impassioned, quivering, flushed, he strove to clasp her; but she escaped his arm. He caught her cape; and, tearing it from her throat, she left it in his grasp. With a quick, desperate step, he followed her in the meadow, but stopped suddenly, with a curse muttered through his teeth, at sight of Phœbe. She was approaching, out of breath, to tell him that no gloves were to be found.

"Why! what is the matter with Charlotte?"

"We have had a terrible quarrel!"

Phœbe, with great eyes: "About what?"

"About you, darling! She is jealous. Watch her, Phœbe. I shall walk by the corner of the orchard this evening at nine; meet me there, and I will tell you more."

And, leaving Phœbe flattered and excited by the important charge, Robert retreated across the field.

That night Charlotte conferred with Mr. Jackwood, whom she found the same prompt and hearty friend as of old. His earnest sympathy, and his ready promise of secrecy and aid, brought tears of gratitude to her eyes.

"How shall I ever repay you?"

"Don't speak o' that! I only wish I could do suthin' hansum by ye," said the farmer. — "Hark! who's there?"

Phœbe entered, with a shawl over her head.

"I thought ye was abed long ago! Where ye ben?"

Phœbe, very innocently: "Nowheres — only setting under the stoop a little."

"And here it is 'most ten o'clock! Be ye crazy? I hope ye han't ketched yer death-o'-cold, in the night-air. Go to bed! Cha'lotte an' me's havin' a-talk 't an't necessary you should hear."

Phœbe, pretending obedience, lighted a candle, and withdrew. But the young girl had impressed Charlotte strangely; and, having vainly attempted to pursue the subject on which she had been conversing with Mr. Jackwood, she bade him good-night, and opened the entry-door just in time to hear a step and the rustling of a dress, and catch a glimpse of Phœbe's candle vanishing up the stairs.

On the following day, Phœbe gave her father no peace, in her persistent efforts to draw from him the secret of his talk with Charlotte.

"What a botheration you be!" exclaimed the indulgent Jackwood. "Will ye keep it to yourself, if I tell ye?"

"Of course, I will — if it's anything I don't ought to tell," added Phœbe, securing that loop-hole for her conscience.

"Wal, I 'xpect we're goin' to lose Cha'lotte. Spite of all I can say, she thinks she must be goin' away to-morrow."

"Going?" echoed Phœbe, startled. "Where?"

"That I don' know myself; only I'm to carry her over to the railroad in time for the train 't goes north."

Phœbe was touched; Phœbe was softened; Phœbe was no longer jealous. She ran to Charlotte, and threw her arms around her neck.

"I knew something was the matter!" she stammered forth. "You're going off, and it's me that's made you so unhappy you can't stay! And you won't never forgive me, — I don't see how you can!"

"My dear child!" said Charlotte, very tenderly, "you have been a little unjust to me, but you have a good heart; and I do forgive you, most sincerely."

"I'm ashamed of myself!" exclaimed Miss Jackwood. "I never knew anybody half so good as you be, nor anybody that I ever loved half so well. And I won't ever see you again!"

"Perhaps not, dear child!"

Then Phœbe threw herself wildly upon a chair, and indulged in spasms, and refused to be comforted on any account.

"Why, Phœbe!" said her mother; "you shan't act so! You'll break a blood-vessel!"

Still Phoebe tortured herself; nor would she suffer anything to come between her and her grief, until Bim appeared, driving Rover in harness. The pleasing novelty had a singularly quieting effect upon her nerves; and, five minutes later, she might have been seen busily engaged in sewing together strips of cloth for traces, with the understanding that when the silly-looking cur was properly attached to the wagon, she should be allowed to drive. Still her grief returned at intervals, and was very violent indeed. It did not, however, prevent her from keeping an appointment she had made to meet Mr. Greenwich that night; and afterward, going late to bed, she slept so soundly, that, when called to breakfast, next morning, she dreamed that her mother was chasing her and Robert around the orchard with a broom, and crying to her to stop.

It was a chill, cloudy day, and, as Mr. Jackwood drove through the gate with Charlotte, he felt a rain-drop strike his hand.

"Hold on!" said he; "we didn't put in the umbrel', arter all! Fetch it 'long, Bim'lech! — Looks kind o' bad to see you start off on your ja'nt sich a day as this, Cha'lotte. Had n't ye better put it off till fair weather, think?"

But Charlotte told him no. The time had come; and, dreary as the future seemed, she must go forth to meet it.

"Come, come!" cried Mr. Jackwood, "what's that boy about?"

"He's trying to make Rover draw the umbrella on the wagon," said Phoebe.

Bim, appearing around the corner: "Git up, Rove! He'p! clear the track! The big team's comin'!"

Mr. Jackwood: "Quit yer nonsense, boy, an' bring along that umbrel'!"

Bim, stoutly: "An't I bringin' it? — Whoa, — back!"

The wagon had struck a post, and lodged. While Bim was disengaging the vehicle, Rover took advantage of a slack rein, and, attempting to leap through a favorite hole in the fence, progressed in the undertaking as far as his hind-quarters, when the

wagon held him fast. A terrific yelping ensued, as Bim helped him out of the difficulty by the legs.

"There!" said Mr. Jackwood, "don't le' me see that dog harnessed up agin to-day!"

He spread the umbrella, which Phoebe handed up to him, and, having once more earnestly counselled Charlotte to postpone her expedition, touched the horse with the whip, and drove away.

Somehow, Charlotte could not utter her "good-by." Yet, as the animal trotted slowly along the dusty road, amid the pattering rain, she looked back. Mrs. Jackwood watched her from the front door, with a countenance full of regretful and tender interest. Phoebe stood at the gate, waving her handkerchief in the air, and wiping her eyes with it, alternately. Even Bim, although ostensibly engaged in training Rover to hold up his foolish head in harness, and keep his tail from between his legs, showed unmistakable signs of unmanly weakness, in passing the corner of his sleeve across his eyes. Then there was a repetition of farewells; and Phoebe and her mother went in, out of the rain; and Charlotte was once more a homeless wanderer in the gloomy world.

Patter, patter, went the dull rain, drumming upon the umbrella, checkering the dusty bed of the road, and rattling among the dry leaves. The sky grew darker still, and a long line of showers swept along the misty mountain side. Then a peculiar smell of mould, exhaling from the earth, loaded the atmosphere. The weather was chill, too, and Charlotte found it necessary to wrap her shawl closely about her, to keep warm.

They rode past Mr. Dunbury's house, and Charlotte's sad eyes looked their last upon the spot that had been more than a home to her, in the summer that was gone. The house stood silent and gloomy in the rain; the windows of Hector's chamber were closed and curtained; and the little portico, under which he used to sit, was desolate and deserted. The only living object in view was Corny, who sat upon the fence, under the shelter of the door-yard trees, whittling. Recognizing the half-concealed face that peered from the sombre background of the umbrella, he poised his knife and stick, nodded, and grinned. Mr. Jackwood drew rein a mo-

ment, to inquire after Mrs. Dunbury's health, and to receive a letter, which Bridget brought out for Charlotte, — then drove on, stopping not again until the railway-station was reached.

"By jingoes!" said Mr. Jackwood, who never indulged in profanity except on exciting occasions, "we're jest in time! There comes the cars! Not many minutes to lose, nuther; for they'll be off agin in a jiffy."

Bell ringing, steam whizzing, wheels clanging and clashing, the engine, with the long train behind, rolled past the platform of the little country station, and came to a halt. During the excitement of getting aboard, Charlotte happily forgot everything else. She was safely seated, and Mr. Jackwood had barely time to give her the check for her baggage, and bid her good-by, when the bell rang again, the engine panted and gasped, and the train was once more in motion. She returned the hasty pressure of his hand, but she had no words either of farewell or of thanks. The next moment, he was gone; only strangers surrounded her; and the terrible engine thundered on with the train that bore her swiftly to an unknown destiny, over a dark and rainy land.

At first Charlotte gave little heed to external objects. Her spirit dwelt deeply within itself. And now, notwithstanding the gloom and mist that shrouded the future, she experienced a sense of relief, amounting almost to happiness, in the thought that thus the past, with all its errors, with all its troubles and alarms, was swept behind her, as it were, into a gulf.

Swiftly, more swiftly still, sped the train, — on, on, on, through woods and vales, over streams and chasms, under the mountain's rocky ribs, with echoing clang and roar. Charlotte felt a wondrous joy swell in her heart at this wild speed. "Faster, faster — further, further — on, on, on!" said her soul. When the train stopped at way-stations, she became impatient; she could scarce keep her seat; she wished to fly.

Ah! she did not see the crested snake that glided out of the abyss from which she fled, and followed in her track, and kept its glittering eyes upon her still!

But once, when the cars had stopped, she looked out of the

window, and glanced her eye up and down the length of the train.

There, upon the platform, stood the man who, of all men, she feared and abhorred. Her impulse was to withdraw instantly from view; but already she was observed; and the detested face approached, wreathed in smiles of hypocritical surprise.

“By what singular chance — where in the wide world are you going?”

The shock and revulsion of the moment had turned Charlotte’s heart to ice.

“The train is off again!” said Robert. “Since there is room in your car, I will take a seat beside you. How singular that we should both be travelling the same way!”

She gave neither word nor look in reply, nor did she stir when he entered and placed himself by her side, but sat faint, and cold, and still, while once more the rushing and thundering wheels bore her on and away.

XX.

“TWO NEGATIVES DESTROY EACH OTHER.”

“If you please, sir,” said the girl behind the counter, ‘you have not paid for the cakes and coffee.”

“If—you—please, sir,” repeated the customer, “you have not paid!—Simplicity or cunning? You’re a wonderful raven!”

He was a tall, meagre personage, with sunken cheeks, a cadaverous complexion, a restless, glaring eye, locks thin and long, and a fine, light beard flowing like a stream of flax upon his breast. His hat was bruised; his coat soiled with the rain, and buttoned tight to his throat; no linen visible; boots and trousers bespattered with mud.

“Ravens fed the prophet!” His voice had a sepulchral sound, and in speaking he started nervously, glancing with his quick, bright eyes from side to side, with an alert expression. “You presented the cakes; you prevailed upon me to accept coffee; and I said *Cherith*—the brook that is before Jordan.”

“The raven presents her bill,” suggested a glossy moustache near the counter.

As the speaker touched the meagre stranger’s sleeve, the latter turned, with a shudder, and, flirting his arm violently, glanced at the ground with an expression of such loathing, that the spectators looked to see what crawling horror had occasioned the disturbance.

“What was it?” cried a bustling little lady, running to the spot.

The stranger rubbed his arm, a smile of triumph flitting across his pallid face.

“It’s only a shilling,” insisted the girl at the counter.

"Only a shilling," ejaculated the bustling little lady. "Dear me! I thought something had bit him!" looking along the floor, as if to find the money.

"He shook him off into the fire, and he felt no harm!" The stranger turned indulgently to the girl at the counter. "Hear Plato! Think you that he who possesses magnificent intellectual conceptions, and can contemplate all time and all being, can possibly consider — what do you call it? — cakes and coffee, as things of any great importance? The same of shillings. Had he one, or two, or twenty — dust! he would wash his hands of them! But, with nothing that is Cæsar's, what shall he render unto Cæsar?"

At this juncture, the proprietor of the stall, interposing, remarked, in a decided tone, that he was not Cæsar, and knew nothing about Cæsar's affairs; but that, if cakes and coffee had been consumed, cakes and coffee were to be paid for.

"If it's only a shilling," said a gentle voice; and a veiled female, opening a modest little purse, drew forth the required change.

"Temptation — avaunt!" said the delinquent philosopher. "The vulgar pay; but great souls are exempt. True," bowing graciously, "he has been scoffed at, cast into prison, beaten with stripes; the fate of greatness. But what is martyrdom? Principles are at stake. Choose you to satisfy these publicans? For your soul's sake, if you have money, cast it from you! And, a word of counsel!" — with a glance at the glossy moustache — "beware of the grinning alligator! There are evets in his company, and a brood of saucy young vipers. They ride on his back, and wink with their blood-red eyes!"

"Dear me!" said the bustling little lady, "I don't see anything! Where is it?"

The stranger recoiled to let the moustache pass, but, stepping quickly after, detained the veiled female by the fringe of her shawl.

"His home is in the mud! There let him crunch turtles; but keep him away from the birds' nests. He is of the grinning species, and his breath is poisonous. Beware of the shaggy jaws!"

With gentle force she disengaged her shawl, and, passing on, traversed a wet wharf at the foot of the rainy town. Beyond lay a steamboat, in waiting for passengers proceeding northward by the lake; and, in company with a crowd of umbrellas, carpet-bags, band-boxes, and hat-boxes, she went hurriedly aboard. The glossy moustache kept by her side; and the bustling little lady, accompanied by a short, swaggering gentleman, followed after.

The stranger stood holding aloft the hand that had come in contact with the shawl-fringe, bowing and smiling fantastically. Presently he seemed to fall into conversation with it; when, suddenly appearing struck with some forcible remark from his imaginary interlocutor, he kissed it worshipfully, and skipped along the wharf to the boat. At the door of the ladies' cabin, he encountered the glossy moustache, whose wearer happened at that moment to be engaged in biting it somewhat savagely.

"Creep, you creature! There's your element," pointing at the lake. "You are out of your place above-board."

As Robert Greenwich did not stir, the other moved cautiously by the door, stepping high, as if walking over some disagreeable object, and passed triumphantly into the cabin.

"Woman!" — the stranger, advancing to the veiled female, bent his tall form before her — "I beg your salutation!"

And straightway down he went upon one knee; but, quick as thought, Charlotte had changed her place, leaving him in that rather singular posture before the vacant seat. Not the least disconcerted, regarding the movement simply as an invitation to be seated, he arose, and, settling softly and reverently in the place she had occupied, maintained a dignified deportment in view of his imaginary honors.

"Incognito!" he said, significantly. "But I saw through the veil. The south wind came to my nostrils; it breathed your name in my ear!"

Charlotte started with alarm; upon which a jubilant light danced in the stranger's restless eyes.

"What if I whisper it?" — and his unshaven lips approached her trembling cheek. "The new Queen of Sheba, in search of a prime minister!"

If there was any mirthful element in this grave and formal announcement, Charlotte's poor, startled heart could not see it.

"All was foreshadowed, your majesty! A queen was to come out of the south, and she was to be known by her magnanimity and beauty. And the voice said unto me, 'Thou shalt be chief in the New Jerusalem!' — that is, your majesty's prime minister. Hail to the glorious dispensation! No pollution of money, no intemperance; no poverty; no labor, except that to which each is impelled by the affinity of his genius. The Seven Wise Men have the credit. They are always with me, — except in potato-time; then bad spirits haunt me."

Charlotte's sad eye sought in vain among the people moving through the cabin for some friendly face, to which she might look for relief; when, perceiving Robert's sinister visage peering in at the door, the thought came to her that these two negatives to her happiness, like two negatives in a grammatical construction, might be made to counteract each other.

"Do you not observe that we are watched?" indicating negative number one.

"Alligator's eyes!" exclaimed negative number two. "He is amphibious; send him to sea on a chip!"

"But, consider — we must not speak together when he is near."

"His hide is thick; but there's a sword to pierce 'twixt his scales! A warrior for the truth — the queen's prime minister shall be commander-in-chief of her forces. There's danger threatened from the Low Countries. I'll make him my chariot, and ride him home from victory. Ha!"

Negative number two pointed, triumphantly, at the door.

Negative number one had disappeared. Upon which Charlotte entreated negative number two to follow the example.

"There's slime on the threshold," said number two, rising. "I'll spread down my coat, when your majesty steps over. My armor shall be painted red, to cheat the enemy with the thought 'tis blood. But I'll ride a black steed, and have a mantle of darkness, that night and I may be of the same color! Adieu, your majesty! When sent for, I'll appear."

No sooner was Charlotte left alone, than a chubby, smiling face, with gold spectacles and a squint, moved over to her from the opposite side of the cabin. It was the bustling little lady from the wharf.

“Do tell me what strange being is that! Is n’t he insane?”

“I think so; but I never saw him until this hour.”

And Charlotte, eager for sympathy and protection, proceeded to relate the adventure.

“Dear me! how queer!” exclaimed the chubby little lady.

“An’t you afraid of him?”

“O, no!” Charlotte smiled sadly. “The boat will start presently; he will lose me and forget me, and perhaps go about finding other princesses.”

“But if he should go with the boat?”

“O, he has no money!”

“He won’t stop to think of that!—Are you travelling alone?”

“I have no person on whom I can depend.”

“I’ll tell my husband,” said the chubby lady, “and have him speak to the cap’n; that’ll fix it! You better keep with us, had n’t ye?”

Charlotte gladly accepted the proposal; then, the chubby lady calling her husband, the chubby lady’s husband consulted an officer of the boat, and the officer of the boat addressed the self-styled prime minister. This individual had not only remained on board, but he manifested a decided disinclination to going ashore; and, to save him from violent handling, Charlotte, at the chubby lady’s suggestion, and in the chubby lady’s company, left the saloon, to speak to him.

“Salutation, your majesty! The alligator is gone, and I keep guard. But here are conspirators! They exact money, and propose removing me from the boat. If they do, the boat shall go with me. I have Chilo’s word for it, in the voice of the sacred titmouse.”

Chubby lady, pressing forward: “Let ’em do it; then have the law of ’em!”

Prime minister: “One of your majesty’s suite?”

Charlotte: "She is a companion."

"Ah! the Duchess of Dingledom! I knew a duchess once 'As I was going to St. Ives,' as they say in the arithmetic. She had the crooked back of a witch, and a crooked nose and chin; and in her mouth she had a twitch, and in her gait she had a hitch, and in her hand she carried a switch, to aid her work of sin. She had fifty imps for children. Go not too near her, your majesty; she has handled crawling things. What she observed of law savors of the profane. There shall be no litigation in our kingdom."

Charlotte: "Nor resistance. Go peaceably from the boat, will you not?"

Prime minister: "That's good calculation! Euclid came, in the form of a black humming-bird with six wings, and taught me the new method in three easy lessons. No offence, Dingledom? You're an excellent creature; but you need washing. If I fall in with the alligator, there'll be teeth broken. Once more—adieu, your majesty! Good-by, your grace! What shall be the signal?"

Charlotte placed her finger on her lips. The prime minister looked intelligent; bowed profoundly, and, glancing from side to side, with quick starts, as if fearing surprise, marched over the plank to the wharf.

"To think!" exclaimed the chubby lady, delighted, "he called me a duchess! How nicely we have got rid of him!"

Ah, but there was another who could not be got rid of so easily! Charlotte's mind reverted to Robert, and her eye wandered up the street to watch his coming.

"Do look at him!" exclaimed the duchess, alluding to negative number two. "Where d' he get that pitchfork?"

"A lance to spear alligators!" cried the prime minister. "The Seven Wise Men sent it by an invisible messenger."

And, shouldering the implement, he marched to and fro across the wharf, with stately pace, like a sentinel. He had scarce commenced a second turn, when the invisible messenger became suddenly visible, appearing in the form of a juvenile hostler, in ragged trousers and a dirty shirt, who, standing agape to see

the steamboat off, had placed the fork temporarily against a post.

"Here!" whined the young Mercury, running after him "give it up! They did n't send it to ye! It's mine! Pa wants it to pitch hay in the shed! Come!"

The prime minister chose, however, to consider him still invisible, and continued his stately march, with strides magnificent, regardless of the clamor at his heels.

"Let's stay out and watch him," said the duchess. "It don't rain, now; and my husband says the boat's going to start in a few minutes."

The bell began to ring, and the passengers from the wharf hurried aboard. Still no Robert Greenwich; and Charlotte conceived a trembling hope that he might not appear.

"I shall die, laughing at that crazy man!" exclaimed the duchess. "How funny the boy looks, with his smutty face! He is beginning to cry. I wonder why don't we start!"

The bell continued to ring; the steam escaped with a loud noise; then came three or four sailors, bearing a long box. How slow they were, thought Charlotte. Too slow, alas! for while they were still upon the plank Robert Greenwich appeared, walking at a rapid pace towards the boat. Charlotte's heart sickened. How vain her hope seemed, then! She should have known that one so remorseless and so resolute as he would not be left behind.

"Why, what's the crazy man about?" cried the excited duchess. "Do look at him!"

Charlotte looked with amazement. Negative number two, springing upon negative number one, had dexterously thrust the fork-handle between his feet, in a manner to trip and send him headlong to the ground. Then, instantly, the implement turning in the air, the two broad tines lighted astride the neck of the fallen man, as he attempted to rise, and pinned him to the wharf. He struggled and cried out; but the warrior for the truth thrust valorously; and, with face in the sand, eyes starting from their sockets, knees and elbows braced desperately, and one hand grasping the fork with a furious endeavor to unfix its yoke-like embrace, Robert bore not a slight resemblance, perhaps, to a

writhing and twisting reptile, of the species to which he was supposed to belong.

"Victory!" shouted negative number two, "at the sign of St. George and the dragon!"

"All aboard!" cried a voice of command. "Cast off there!"

The plank was secured, the cables plashed in the water, the buzz of the steam ceased, the engineer's bell tinkled, the rushing wheels revolved.

Bystanders, meanwhile, ran to Robert's rescue. The overthrewer was overthrown; the fork fell from his grasp; the ragged urchin seized it; and while negative number one, rising impetuously, sprang to catch the boat, negative number two took discreetly to his heels, and fled with light and airy bounds up the street.

Shouting, furious, swinging his bruised and muddled hat, Robert flew to the edge of the wharf. The steamer was just beyond; but a boiling chasm whirled between. He dared not leap; he stood, a picture of baffled rage, his fiery eye glaring upon Charlotte, from the landing. Just then the sun broke through a cloud, and poured a flood of golden light upon the scene. The foam sparkled, the waves danced, the shore receded, and the vessel's prow dashed gayly through the glittering waters of Lake Champlain.

XXI.

BIM S DISCOVERIES.

"COME, Phoebe," said Mrs. Jackwood, "empty the water out of the p'taters ; your father's come, and he'll want his dinner. How absent-minded you be !"

Phoebe stood looking vacantly out of the window, towards the village.

"I'd like to know whether I'm lazy, or what's the matter with me ! Ever since Charlotte went, I can't do anything,—not even pare apples."

"It's a little more Robert Greenwich than Charlotte, I guess !"

"I don't care—he's treated me real mean ! He has n't been near the house since Charlotte went ; and I bet he's followed her, wherever she's gone !"

"Let Robert Greenwich go, and 'tend to what you're doin' !"

Phoebe was on the point of pouring the potato-water into the churn.

"What on arth has got into the child ?" cried Mr. Jackwood, scraping his feet at the door.

"I don't know ; she does everything wrong-eend foremost. Jest now, she come within an inch of emptyin' the cream-pot into the swill-tub ! If I had n't screamed, 't would a' gone, sure as the world ! Put on that churn-cover, now, 'fore you forgit it ! You took it, and what you done with 't, I don't know."

"I'm sure I don't," replied Phoebe, thoughtfully, holding the potato-kettle. "I remember putting something on the pump, and it must be that."

"There's nothing here but the butcher-knife," said Mr. Jackwood, from the pump-room.

"Do tell if that's there! and here I've been huntin' for 't this quarter of an hour! I never see! Be you crazy, child?"

Phoebe, chagrined: "I don't know but I be! for, here, I've been emptying potatoes and all into the sink! — What's that Rover's got to play with?"

Mr. Jackwood: "I warrant, if Rover's in the question, your eyes'll be sharp enough! I declare, — what is it, mother? It's suthin' 't must a' got lost off the line last washin'-day! Strange, folks can be so careless! Here, you pesky pup!"

"That's nothin' from the line," retorted Mrs. Jackwood; "we an't so careless as all that comes to. It's some of Phoebe's work, if anybody's."

"Everything will be laid to *Phæbe* now, I suppose! Well, I can stand it! — Why don't you git it away, father?"

The dog having paid no attention to his first summons, Mr. Jackwood made an onset upon him with a short switch. But Rover, if he did not actually think it was a sham-fight, meant to make it one, and began to whisk and caper about the yard; sometimes stopping to shake the garment playfully, or lying upon it with his paws, and growling valorously, until Mr. Jackwood came within reach; then, seizing it in his teeth, darting away just in time to avoid a capture.

"I declare!" cried Phoebe, "it looks like Charlotte's white cape!"

"Can't be!" said Mr. Jackwood, "for Charlotte's miles away."

"May be she is, and may be she an't!" replied Phoebe, significantly. "But that's her cape, true's the world! Now you can get it!"

Rover had dropped the article beside the path, and gone to roll himself in the dust, as if nothing had happened. But this was only a ruse; and as Mr. Jackwood approached, he snuffed, shook the dirt from his ears, and lay, with his nose upon the ground, ready for a spring. Mr. Jackwood frowned; Rover winked and looked knowing.

"Rover! behave!"

"G-r-r-r-r-r!" said Rover.

Mr. Jackwood measured his distance, and rushed suddenly upon

the disputed property. But Rover, at a pounce, was there before him. He caught the cape in his teeth; as it happened, however, somebody's foot was on one corner of it; and the next moment somebody's hand clutched the loose hide about his neck. Rover pleaded; Rover whined; but the hand held fast.

"Come here, sir!" said Mr. Jackwood. "If you can't tell when folks are in arnest, an' when they're in play, I'll larn ye, so 's 't you'll know, in futur'!"

"I'll try! I'll try! I'll try!" yelped Rover, plainly as talking.

"It's Bim's to blame!" interposed Phœbe. "He's always fooling with him!"

Mr. Jackwood appeared to consider that Phœbe was not far from right; and, having bestowed a few light cuts across Rover's back, dismissed him, with a grave admonition. The dog ran off, rubbing his left ear with his paw, and lay down, dejectedly, under the wagon.

Meanwhile Phœbe had possessed herself of the garment, and taken it to the house. Had it been a common article of apparel, it would have attracted very little attention; but it was a light and graceful cape of Charlotte's own manufacture, and the fair figures her needle had wrought, together with its original delicate white color, rendered its recent cuts and stains all the more striking by contrast. What surprised the family most was the discovery that some of the stains were of blood.

"Le' me see it!" said Mr. Jackwood, taking the article in his hand, for the twentieth time. "Suthin' here!" with a profound expression. "Mother, look an' see if that wan't cut with a knife!"

Mother looked; Phœbe looked; and Mr. Jackwood looked again.

"What do you think, father?" asked the excited Phœbe.

"The dog never tore that in this world! It's been cut; an' this blood on 't an't four-'n'-twenty hours old, or I miss my guess! Where in the world could the dog git holt on 't? Where's Bim'lech? Does anybody know?"

"O, I'm real frightened!" stammered Phœbe. "I—I'm

afraid I've been to blame, some way. But — I'm sure — I did n't think I was doing any wrong."

"What do you mean? What have you done?"

"I told Robert when Charlotte was going away, — I don't know what I did it for, — but he made me think —"

Mr. Jackwood: "He made ye think the moon was made o' green cheese, if he tried to, I've no doubt! Did n't I tell ye Cha'lotte wanted it kep' from everybody? — But what has that to do with the cape?"

"If anything has happened to her, it's all owing to me!" said the remorseful Phœbe. "She was afraid of him, an' one day they had a dreadful quarrel down by the crick. He said 't was because she was jealous of me."

Mrs. Jackwood: "Jealous of you! That's an idee! For my part, I never imagined Robert cared a snap of his finger for you!"

"Where's Bim'lech, I wonder?" said Mr. Jackwood. "That boy never's in sight when he's wanted!"

"*What* boy never's in sight when he's wanted?" cried a blustering voice at the door.

Phœbe: "Here he is!"

Abimelech, stoutly: "Yes, here he is! An' he'd like to find out who's ben lickin' Rove?"

Mr. Jackwood: "S'posin' I have? What then?"

"Wal!" — began the younger Jackwood, with a belligerent shake of the head.

"Wal, what?"

"I'd — like to know what he'd ben doin', — that's all!"

"He was tearin' this 'ere cape; an' what I want of you is, to tell how he come by it."

Bim looked ignorant: "What cape?"

"Charlotte's cape," cried Phœbe. "It's been cut, and tore, and there's blood on it! Where did you find it?"

"Jes' if I found it! What you talkin' 'bout?"

Mr. Jackwood, sternly: "Look a' here, Bim'lech!"

"An't I lookin' hard 's I can?"

"Don't speak so! I'll have that dog killed, if you're goin

to be so pudgicky when he's whipped for gitt'n' into mischief; mind, I tell ye! Now, speak the truth, and tell us what you know about this 'ere cape!"

Bim: "What should I know about it?"

Phoebe: "He does know! I can tell."

Bim: "You can tell, a sight! Rove found it down in the meadow."

Mr. Jackwood: "Bim'lech, 'tend to me! Tell me how it come cut?"

"Rove tore it; I was goin' to lick him for 't, if I could ketched him."

"But that was done with a knife!"

"'T was jes' so when I found it, — perty nigh."

Phoebe: "You said Rove found it!"

"Wal, — what if I did? Wan't Rove an' me together? And an't Rove my dog? — say!"

"That 'll do, Phoebe! Bim'lech, do you know anything about this blood?"

Bim, interested: "What blood? O! that! You make a great fuss about an old rag, I should think! An't we goin' to have no dinner to-day? Where's the wash-basin?"

"Bim'lech," said Mrs. Jackwood, "come here!"

Bim, scowling: "What ye want?"

Mrs. Jackwood held the young gentleman by the collar, and, wetting the corner of her handkerchief with her tongue, rubbed it on his cheek.

"Come!" exclaimed Bim, jerking away; "what's that for?"

"Hold still! what's on your face?"

"I d'n' know! what? — O, Pheeb! you can't guess what I got!" and Bim pulled something from his pocket.

"A letter! Where did you git it?"

Bim, triumphantly: "I found it with the cape!"

Phoebe: "It's Robert Greenwich's name on the back! And there's blood on the letter! Are you sure you found them together?"

"Of course I be! Wan't the letter under the cape? And did n't it drop out when I picked it up?"

"I guess I can tell somethin' 'bout the blood," said Mrs. Jackwood. "Hold here agin, Bim'lech. — Han't you ben havin' the nose-bleed?"

"Yes, — I had the nose-bleed a little! What of it?"

"An' you got blood on the cape!"

"Mebby I got a little on."

"Bim'lech!" said Mr. Jackwood, solemnly, "step this way! Look me in the eye! Now le's have the truth, the hull truth, and nothin' but the truth."

"Wal, don't I?"

"I wan't goin' to punish ye; we only wanted to know the truth of the matter; for we was afraid suthin' had happened to Charlotte. Now, was there, or was there not, blood on the cape when you found it?"

Bim, hesitating: "The rain, or suthin', had spotted it, any way."

"And you cut it with your knife a little, did n't ye?" in a coaxing tone.

Bim, doubtfully: "Le' me think! Yes, now I remember! I did cut it a little; but 't was an old thing!"

Phoebe: "O, what stories!"

"Phoebe! I'm dealin' with him! What 'd ye cut it for?"

"Wal," — Bim scratched his head, — "I cut it! — 't wan't good for nothin'!"

Mr. Jackwood, tapping the floor with his foot: "Answer my question!"

"Id'no, — I thought —" Bim began to grin — "'t would make a good jacket for Rove, — like that the little monkey had on to the caravan."

"Boy! Then you made these holes?"

Bim looked foolish: "Wal, — I had to make some holes for his legs, or it would n't stay on to him."

"That's right!" said Mr. Jackwood, approvingly; "always tell the truth, my son; for liars never prosper."

Phoebe: "I should n't think he 'd prosper, then!"

"'Sh! never mind! he's done perty well. — How did you git the rose-bleed, my son?"

"He did n't like the jacket; an' when I held him to put his legs in the holes, he jumped, an' kicked, — till by 'n' by he hit my nose the awfulest tunk with the back of his head! I hung on, though, till I see the blood runnin'; then he cut for the house, with the cape hangin' by his neck an' one leg."

"Why could n't ye a' told this in the fust place?"

Bim, giggling: "'Cause you was all makin' sich a fuss about the ol' rag, an' I did n't know how hard I'd have to take it! I meant to tell, all the time; but I thought 't would n't do no hurt to let on a little to once."

"That don't explain how the cape come in the meader, arter all. And Green'ich's letter with it, too! — I don't s'pose 't 'll do no harm to open it, sence the wafer's broke, an' find out who wrote it. — What name 's that 'ere, Phœbe? Your eyes are better 'n mine."

"Why, it 's Hector Dunbury's!"

"Hector Dunb'ry's, hey? Wal, I guess we 'll set up to the table, now; and arter dinner, Bim'lech, you can go 'n' carry the letter over to Mr. Dunb'ry's folks. If it 's from Hector, they 've a better right to it than we have. Don't be readin' it, Phœbe!"

Phœbe: "I an't, — but, — how strange! Hector's gone to Californy!"

Mr. Jackwood: "Here, here! you shan't read it! Give it to me. Can't be he's gone to Californy! His folks 'u'd know suthin' 'bout it, if he had."

Phœbe: "Just let me make out this sentence. It 's something about Charlotte."

Mrs. Jackwood: "Come, Bim'lech, take off your cap, an' wash your face, if you 're goin' to Mr. Dunbury's. Don't throw your cap! I declare for 't!"

Bim, flinging his cap at the sink-shelf, had missed his aim, and sent it plump into the churn. A tumult ensued, as Mrs. Jackwood, in great trepidation, fished it out, and hastened to hold it, with the dripping cream, over a milk-pan.

Bim, with bravado: "You might keep the churn covered up!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "How many times did I tell you, Phœbe! — It 's well for both of ye 't I 've got my hands full!"

"I don't know what I did with the cover," said Phoebe, still clinging to the letter.

"Come, come!" exclaimed Mr. Jackwood. "Have I got to take it away from you by main force?"

Phoebe, relinquishing her hold: "I don't think Hector speaks very well of Charlotte, anyhow! That's the way with men, though; and I suppose Robert will write to him the same about me!"

Mrs. Jackwood: "Father, do set that child to doin' suthin'! If you can't think of anything else, take the pie out of the oven. Then hunt for that churn-cover till you find it."

Phoebe opened the oven-door. There was no pie there; but in its place she found the missing churn-cover, baked brown, and so hot that she dropped it on the floor with a scream.

XXII.

TWO SKELETONS IN ONE HOUSE.

AN old gentleman, in a loose suit of drab, with a white cravat, a white whisker, and a thin fleece of white hair frizzled all over his head, took off his hat (a white one) to the clerk of a second-class hotel, in Montreal.

"I wish to see a — a Miss — a Miss —" The white gentleman hesitated, and fumbled in his breast-pocket. "I've forgotten the name, and left the letter at home. I'll glance at your books, if you please."

"Presently," said the clerk; "as soon as this gentleman is done with them."

The gentleman referred to was a gay young fellow, with a moustache; precisely such a moustache, by the way, as Phœbe Jackwood so much admired, and pined to behold once more, on Huntersford Creek. The wearer looked up, with a questioning air, at the clerk.

"Mr. Sperkley's party arrived here the twelfth?"

"Ay," said the clerk, "night before last."

"Is Mr. Sperkley in?"

"Mr. Sperkley is out, this morning?"

"Thank you; I will call again," — and the moustache retired.

"Sperkley, — Sperkley," repeated the white gentleman, referring to the register. "That is the name I was to inquire for, I think. '*Mr. Sperkley, lady, and friend*,' — and it's the friend I desire to see. Is she in?"

"A young lady; ay, — I think so. Shall I send up your name?"

The white gentleman's card being despatched to Mrs. Sperkley's apartment, answer was promptly returned that the ladies would

meet him in the public parlor. He had not long to wait. Scarcely had he taken his seat, when a bustling, chubby little woman entered, bright and smiling as the sun, and breathless with running down stairs. She was dressed in stiff, rustling silks, and wore heavy jewels in her ears and on her fingers; gold-bowed spectacles on her nose, a massive chain of gold about her neck, and a watch and pencil in her belt.

"How do you do?" she cried, with a hearty demonstration of friendship. "Have you seen my husband?"

"Your husband? — Is this Mrs. Sperkley?"

"Yes, this is Mrs. Sperkley," — with an air which seemed to say, don't you think it's a pretty nice Mrs. Sperkley, after all? — "And you are Mr. Holyland?"

"Longman was the name on my card."

"Longman? Dear me! how could I make that mistake, and read it Holyland?"

"I wish to see a young lady who is, I think, in your company."

"O, the person we got acquainted with aboard the boat! She has been expecting some one to call. I'll run and speak to her."

She rushed, rustling, from the parlor. The white gentleman looked dissatisfied, and walked the room as if he was more than half inclined to walk out of it, and out of the hotel, and out of the society of Mr. Sperkley, lady, and friend, forever. His expression brightened, however, when the door again opened.

"Miss Woods —" Charlotte smiled assent, and he gave her his hand. "I received your note accompanying Mrs. Dunbury's letter last night, but at too late an hour —"

"Do not apologize," said Charlotte, embarrassed. "You are but too kind to come to me at all. On Mrs. Dunbury's recommendation, I ventured to apply to you, — I am here, a stranger, — and what I desire is, to find some situation —"

"Leave that to the future," replied the white gentleman "How are you situated here at the hotel?"

"Comfortably as could be expected, I suppose."

"And your friends?"

"Friends? — I have none."

"I mean, the Sperkley family."

"O!" said Charlotte, with a smile, "I may, perhaps, call them friends, for they have been kind, and helped me through difficulties in travelling that I could hardly have surmounted alone. But they are mere chance acquaintances."

"So much the better! Now, I'll tell you what; without any ceremony, and with as little delay as possible, you shall leave this house, and go home with me. So much accomplished, we'll see what else can be done. One thing at a time, is my motto."

It had been so far from Charlotte's expectation or design to intrude upon anybody's hospitality, that the offer appeared all the richer and more welcome to her homelessness. With a full heart she accepted it. This settled, the white gentleman, having a small business matter to attend to in the same street, took leave, but returned promptly, in half an hour, as he had promised. Charlotte was ready for a departure, and had nothing to do but exchange "good-bys" with Mrs. Sperkley.

"Our acquaintance has been very pleasant," said the duchess, making an affecting demonstration with her handkerchief. "I am very sorry to lose you so soon; and, re'ly, I shall have a good cry over it, when you are gone!"

The little woman exhibited something of the genuine ore of human feeling, as well as a good deal of the dross; and Charlotte, in whom the faintest show of kindly sympathy on the part of others never failed to awaken grateful emotions, returned her boisterous kiss with a quiet touch of her pure lips, accompanied with an earnest inward prayer for her happiness. At parting, the duchess wished her to accept a gold ring, which she drew from her finger, as a memento; but Charlotte with gentle dignity declined it, and it went back to its place on the chubby red hand.

A few minutes' ride brought Charlotte and her companion to a plain, sober little house, pleasantly located, in the upper part of the town. This proved the residence of the white gentleman; and here, disembarking with her baggage, she was welcomed to her new home by one of the sunniest faces she had ever met.

"My daughter, Mrs. Lawrence Longman," said the white gentleman.

She was not beautiful; she was pale and faded: but there was

something exceedingly tender in her expression, which drew Charlotte to her at once.

— “I was sure father would bring you home with him,” said Mrs. Lawrence. “Your room is all ready for you.”

It was a cosey little chamber, the windows of which looked out upon a garden and a country road. On entering it, Charlotte was thrilled with happiness and surprise. She glanced around her; she gazed from the window; she turned her suffused eyes upon the smiling, tender face of the gentle woman who had given her so rich a welcome. She attempted to speak; she put out her hand, but a flood of tears overtook her.

“You see what a foolish creature I am!” said she, with a smile of living love brightening through her tears. “But I cannot help it! such good things happening to me, when I deserve them so little!”

The gentle woman whispered a word of cheer, and glided from the room. It was an hour of deep and holy emotion to Charlotte. Her gratitude to God, and to the friends he had given her, arose to rapture; feeling, as she did, that her feet were now led into sweet pastures for a season, and that here she might lie down and rest by the cool waters.

When next she met Mrs. Longman, her appearance had undergone a surprising change. She was attired with a simplicity amounting almost to homeliness; but the charm of her figure, and the spirit of beauty and grace that breathed about her, amply compensated for the lack of external adornments. She had dressed her hair carefully, however; and to that, perhaps, she owed no small part of her personal attractions. In the luxuriant arrangement of its rich, soft masses, she had displayed all the natural exultation and exuberance of her spirits. No jewel on her head or about her person, save a simple golden cross upon her neck. It was a trifle Hector had given her, — the only gift of his she had consented to retain, — and this was the first occasion on which she had worn it, since they parted. Her countenance was tranquil and happy, yet there was a softening sadness in it still, which rendered it all the more winning. Her eyes were

wonderfully bright and melting. Mrs. Longman regarded her with quiet admiration.

"And how did you leave Mrs. Dunbury?" that lady asked. "I am sorry Hector has gone again. He appears to have a roving disposition. Is his mind as changeable as his habits? I am not much acquainted with him; I never saw him but twice, and that was years ago. He was then a handsome, high-spirited boy, — adventurous, but very fond of his mother."

Poor Charlotte managed to say, —

"He is your cousin?"

"A sort of second cousin, — and that only by marriage. Mr. Longman is Mrs. Dunbury's uncle; and I am Mr. Longman's daughter-in-law. I wish I knew the family better. Ah, Mrs. Dunbury says such blessed things of you in her letters!"

"Her *letters*!" said Charlotte.

"You did not know, then, that we received one from her by mail only a few hours before the one you brought arrived? Indeed, how should you know? Perhaps it would have been as well not to mention it; but it appears she could not express herself sufficiently in the note she had sent by you; so she afterwards, on her sick bed, took occasion to tell us more about you."

"She is too kind; you must not believe half she says."

"One half will be enough! But, come, I want my mother to see you. She is aged, and a little capricious; she has grown quite impatient about you."

The mother — or rather the mother-in-law — was an emaciated old lady, with an ear-trumpet, a snuff-box, and an extremely feeble, small voice. She proved to be very deaf, and very peevish. She made Charlotte sit up close to her chair, and, giving her the mouth-piece of the trumpet, while she held the other extremity of the tube to her ear, conversed with her from the depths of the pillows in which her attenuated frame was almost hidden from view.

Charlotte had been nearly a week with her new friends, when, one day, as she was keeping the old lady company, she was aroused by an occurrence in the adjoining room. The door was unclosed and she heard Mrs. Longman exclaim,

"Edward, where did you come from?"

"From Paradise, by the back door," replied a voice which made Charlotte start, and strain her ear to catch the faintest intonation. "Do you know what that means? It means quibble-quabble. The world is all a fleeting show. Give me a glass of water."

"Sit down, Edward," said the widow, kindly. "Will you take some wine? You look weary."

"I have been in the wilderness, tempted of the devil. I would not care, if I had not torn my trousers. *When this old hat was new*, — sing me that hymn; I think it is something melancholy, tending to reflection. *And I was young and gay*, — we are older now, Sal! And wiser; did you know it?"

"And wiser," repeated Mrs. Longman.

"I like you, Sal!" said Edward, affectionately. "But there is a deal of milk-and-water in your composition."

"Drink the wine, Edward."

"The milk of human kindness, and the water that delights thirsty souls! That's better than wine. Good Sal! you are one in ten thousand. I would kiss you, but for my oath." The speaker's eye glittered, and his voice sank to a whisper. "I stood on the shore, and saw the ship, rich-freighted with my happiness, sail out of sight in the distance. The Princess of Sheba's ship, — did I tell you?"

Edward seated himself in an attitude of deep thoughtfulness, holding his dilapidated hat in one hand, and the glass in the other. His long, flaxen beard streamed down and touched the wine, as he bent forward, resting his elbow on his knee. The widow stood by, sad and patient, waiting for him to drink.

"Prophecy is a fearful gift." He raised his head, and shook the wine-drops from his beard. "She shall reign; but one is to be sacrificed. Broken ice and water." He seemed to be gazing at some picture, far away, and his finger waved softly in the air. "The river that flows through Sheba; 't is perilous crossing! Sal!" — starting with exultation, — "they've shown me my epitaph! 'T is to be written in fire, on a monument high as the moon!"

The widow came softly, and closed the door.

"What is there?" cried the old lady, agitating her pillows.

'Tell me; no secrecy! Why is the door closed? Quick!"

And the feeble hand extended the mouth-piece, with an impatient jesture. Charlotte replied, through the tube, that some person was talking with Sarah.

"Who? Don't keep me in suspense! I shall die! O, dear! why don't you speak?"

"I don't know who it is."

"Don't know? You must know! You are deceiving me! Sarah has no right —"

"She calls his name Edward."

"Edward! is he here? Why don't he come at once to his mamma? Why does she keep him?"

Charlotte, rising: "I will speak to her."

"No!" whistled the feeble voice; "don't leave me! I shall know nothing, if you do. They take advantage of my infirmities; they impose upon me in all sorts of ways. Poor Edward! he has been out of his mind. O, it's now five years or more! A disappointment. That was the beginning of it. So, he is home again, is he? It runs in the family, — hereditary, you know. Sarah's husband, Lawrence, — he was my oldest, — committed suicide. I went to the garret, one day, and found him hanging from a rafter. I never got over the shock. It all came of his meeting an old flame. They'd been engaged, I can't remember how many years. He had married a new fancy; and when he saw the other again, they had a desperate time. It almost killed Sarah. It's in the Longman family, not in mine. Mr. Longman had a nephew who went the same way. A brother of Mrs. Dunbury, you know. Hector's uncle. We used to think Hector would be like him, — how is it?"

Charlotte shuddered; the picture the invalid once had drawn of her son's possible fate recurring with startling vividness to her mind. At this juncture, the widow entered the room; and Charlotte gave a rapid account of her meeting with Edward, in her northward journey.

"What are you talking?" cried the old lady. "Here!" —

giving Sarah the tube, — “tell me all about it. Don’t omit a word.”

“Presently,” said Sarah. “Edward is coming.”

Charlotte glided out, by another door, as he entered. At sight of his haggard face and tattered clothes, the old lady began to weep. He regarded her compassionately.

“The creature they used to call my mother ! How long has she been a weasel ? If she is hungry, give her some mice. There shall be no hunger in our kingdom, not even among the insignificant races. And no tears either, except liar’s tears !” — through his teeth — “and they shall weep, weep, weep ! Could a princess tell a lie ?”

“What does he say ?” squeaked the old lady.

“When sent for, I shall appear ; and so I told her majesty. Ha !” — his countenance lighted up, as he glanced from the western window, — “the sun sets red ; there is danger brooding for to-morrow !”

“Tell me, quick ! Here !” — the old lady agitated her tube, — “Edward, speak to your poor mamma !”

“I strode that sun once, and rode him through the heavens till I bumped my head against the darkness ! Sal !” — pointing eagerly at the sky, — “do you mark the phantom horseman ? He gallops through a sea of fire !”

“Kiss me, my boy !” whimpered the old lady.

“Since Christmas, I have seen five, — brave riders ! all ! One swims the wave on a dolphin ; that’s Cupid. One scours through the bowels of the earth ; that’s Avarice. And one careers on the mountains ; that’s Ambition. This one is nameless ; but where he rides men’s wits are troubled.”

Already a domestic had been despatched for Mr. Longman. He was not far from home ; he returned speedily ; and finding his son in so unusual a state, he sent in haste for the family physician.

Sleep, said the doctor, was chiefly necessary to restore Edward’s mind and body to their ordinary condition. But he could not be prevailed upon to take any repose.

“I kicked Morpheus out of bed nine days ago ; since then, we

have been strangers. What if her majesty sends, and finds me napping?"

Neither reason nor entreaty could influence him. He walked the room restless, talking wildly. At length Sarah suggested that Charlotte should be invited to exert her power. The others consented; and presently the "princess" appeared.

Was it his imagination only, or something in the magnetism of her gentle spirit, that wrought so wonderful a change in his entire demeanor? His countenance grew placid; his movements less sharp and abrupt; his eye less wild and glaring; he became obedient and tractable as a child. The same extreme sensitiveness to personal influences, that caused him to start and shudder at the approach of impure spheres, seemed also to have revealed to him some innate excellence in Charlotte, to which he owed allegiance. At her request, he consented first to take a warm bath, then to be put to bed; and, having exacted her promise that she would have him waked, without fail, before the ship sailed, he closed his eyes, and soon sank into a profound, perspiring sleep.

"A visitor to see Miss Woods," said the widow, in the forenoon of the next day, showing her benign countenance in Charlotte's chamber.

"Me!" echoed Charlotte, turning pale.

A rapid train of thought passed through her mind. Robert Greenwich, returning to Huntersford, and learning the address of Mrs. Dunbury's relatives in Canada, had hastened to trace her to her last place of refuge. It was what she had feared. But Mrs. Longman relieved her with the welcome intelligence that the visitor was a lady.

"O, Mrs. Sperkley!" said Charlotte.

"What a time I have had finding you!" exclaimed the little woman. "It's curious, as I said to my husband, that I never thought to ask your address. I'd forgotten Mr. Longman's name, too; and, just think! the very next day after you had gone, a young gentleman, who says he has something of great importance for you, came to inquire about you."

"A young gentleman! Who?"

"I declare, I can't speak his name! Strange, for him and my husband got very intimate, and played billiards together, and I don't know what all."

"Does he wear a moustache?"

"O, yes, a very handsome one!"

"Is n't he the same person who was detained from the steam-boat by the insane man?"

"O, yes!" cried the duchess; "and I thought I had seen his face somewhere. But, then, I should think he'd have spoken of it. The way he found us was queer. He could n't see your name on any of the hotel books; so, when he saw our arrival registered as Mr. Sperkley, lady, and friend, he thought you must be the friend."

"And — where is he now?"

"O," said the duchess, "him and my husband has gone down to Quebec together, on some kind of a speculation. My husband is a great speculator; he trades in watches, and di'monds, and all sorts of things. Well, when I was left all alone, and did n't know what else to do with myself, what should I find in my work-box but the very card Mr. Longman sent up to us the day he came to the hotel. And what did I do, but give it to the landlord, and tell him to find out where such a man lived. That was easy; and here I am. I knew you would be glad to see me; for I said to myself, says I, though may be she won't care much about me, she'll be pleased to hear from the young gentleman. O, I remember his name, now! It's Sandwich, or Wolwich, or something of the kind. It's some sort of a wich, any way. You may depend upon seeing him just as soon as he gets back with my husband. You know what he has for you a great deal better than I do."

"Whatever it is," said Charlotte, with sparkling eyes, "I do not wish to receive it!"

"You don't say!" cried the astonished duchess.

"It was expressly to prevent his finding me that I requested your husband not to register my arrival on the books of the hotel. And I hope," added Charlotte, almost weeping with vexation,

“that you will not do me so unwelcome a kindness as to send me any such friends.”

“Why, I am sure, I can’t understand that !”

“No, I do not expect you to. Do not try to ; do not think of it any more ; do not think of me. I have felt very grateful for your kindness to me ; but I beg you will not give yourself any more trouble on my account.”

In a little while the duchess took her leave. Charlotte did not invite her to call again ; and, as she saw her ride smilingly away in the cab, she devoutly hoped that the light of that beaming face might never shine upon her pathway again.

XXIII.

PROSPECTS.

THUS Charlotte had found not only two skeletons in Mr. Longman's house, but there was a fine promise of another coming ; for in truth she placed so little confidence in Mrs. Sperkley's discretion, that she expected nothing more than to see Mr. Robert Greenwich, immediately on his return from Quebec with the travelling watch-trader.

In the mean time, her friends had succeeded in finding a position for her as a companion to a wealthy dowager. The news was imparted to her immediately after the departure of the duchess. It only remained for her to see the lady, and, if they were mutually pleased with each other, to accept the situation. The following day was fixed for the interview.

Mrs. De Rohan was a person of benevolent aspect and mild address. Charlotte entered her presence with fear and trembling ; but a smile reassured her ; she was delighted with the thought of attending upon so kind a lady ; and her only apprehension now was, that her services might not be accepted.

"I see but one difficulty in the way," observed the dowager. "You say the more quiet and retired your life, the better. Now, I intend soon to commence a series of journeys, which will terminate in the good Old Country, in the course of a year or two ; and I shall expect you to accompany me."

Charlotte's pulse leaped with joy. With nothing to bind her to the past but ties that her spirit longed to sever, it is no wonder that she reached out the eager hand of welcome to the future smiling from the cloud which had darkened before her so long.

Yet the joy was tempered with deep and saddening thoughts ; and may we not guess that the image of one she loved rose tremulously before her then ?

That night Charlotte dreamed of Hector. She went with Mrs. De Rohan to San Francisco, where she found him waiting for her under some door-yard trees, which bore a remarkable resemblance to those in front of his father's house. His voice and smile were real ; and all things glowed with a happy blue-and-golden light,—except the weather, which Charlotte found very cold. It was so cold that she awoke ; when she discovered the fresh morning air blowing upon her bed. She had left her window partly open, on retiring, and the wind had changed during the night.

So much for her dream ; but all that morning Hector's image haunted her ; and she chided herself, not only for thinking of him, but for entertaining such fancies even in a dream.

Mr. Longman sent for her to visit his unfortunate son.

“He has somehow conceived the notion that you are going to desert him,” said the old gentleman, in his subdued voice. “You alone have any influence with him ; and I have faith to think that, if you would consent to remain with us, his reason might be restored. I know what a sacrifice it will be for you ; but, if gratitude can repay you — ”

Tears blurred Mr. Longman's vision ; his white eyelashes winked them away, but he had forgotten just what he was saying, and failed to complete the sentence. His words troubled Charlotte ; and, having paid Edward a visit, and rendered him quiet and obedient to the wishes of his friends, she withdrew to her chamber to consider what it was her duty to do.

The engagement with Mrs. De Rohan seemed too advantageous to be abandoned. It promised freedom and a new life. On the other hand, if she could work a vital benefit to any fellow unfortunate, was the opportunity to be neglected ?

She determined to dismiss the subject from her thoughts until the following day, and sat down to write a letter to Mrs. Dunbury. She had not finished the sheet, when a servant appeared, to inform her that there was a gentleman below, waiting to see

her. She could scarce refrain from uttering a cry of distress, but instantly her mind was made up; she determined not to go down.

"He did not give his name," said the servant.

"It was unnecessary," replied Charlotte. "No gentleman would call on me whom I wish to see to-day. Say to him, I am engaged."

She was incensed against herself because Robert Greenwich still had power to unstring her nerves, and quicken the movements of her timid heart. She did not know how agitated she was until the servant had disappeared, and she once more took up her pen to write. In a moment, the subject she had been weighing in her mind that morning was decided. "I will go with Mrs. De Rohan. Then let him follow me to the ends of the earth, if he will!"

The servant reappeared. "The gentleman's compliments; and if Miss Woods is engaged, he will wait in the parlor until she is ready to see him."

"What effrontery! Let him wait, then! — No!" she exclaimed, calling the servant back; "I will go down!"

Five minutes later, she entered the parlor. Her color was heightened; an expression of pain and dread was written upon her brow; but her large eyes beamed with a clear and steady light, and her step, her carriage, and the curving of her mouth, were queenly.

She turned to the corner where the visitor stood. He had been pacing the floor, and on her entrance had halted where she found him; but, after a moment's hesitation, he advanced and sank upon his knee at her feet.

"Charlotte!" breathed a voice whose tones thrilled in every fibre of her frame.

"Hector!" she cried out, in wild and eager surprise; then turning with a gesture of despair, she fell forward upon the sofa, hiding her face from his sight.

He went and stood by her side. He bent over her, putting aside the curls from her cheek. He knelt again and kissed the

hand that hung over the arm of the sofa. His very touch betrayed the tumult in his breast.

"Speak to me! look at me! Why do you turn from me so?"

"I thought," she said, in a stifled and broken voice, "I thought you were — another!"

"Perhaps, then, had you known, you would not have deigned to see me!"

"Yes; I will be plain and true with you. I would, but I should have been prepared; I should not have been surprised by this weakness."

"You had no presentiment, ever so shadowy and vague, that I would come?"

"None!" exclaimed Charlotte; "or, if I had, I dismissed it as the vainest dream of my life."

Hector seated himself, and laid his hand upon her arm with a touch that thrilled her still. "Tell me, Charlotte, are you not conscious of an influence that chains you to me, and me to you, inevitably? Go down into the deepest and purest waters of your heart, and find the response!"

"If ever I thought so," answered Charlotte, "then I was deceived."

"I believe in one only great and overmastering love!" said Hector. "By its magnetism soul is bound with soul, as sphere to sphere in the heavens. It has an astrology of its own, that reveals heart to heart at any distances. If in my wanderings from you I have not felt your spirit following me, and drawing me back, — if when furthest from you I have not been with you, and you with me, continually, — then there is no wisdom or virtue in me!"

"O, but when I told you my history, your love was not proof against that! You said it placed life and death between us. You left me with those words. I did not blame you: but, if you felt so once, you will again. I should not dare, I should not dare, after that —"

"I am not here," responded Hector's deep and earnest tones, "to make weak excuses for weak conduct. I acted then only as he whom you knew as Hector could act. Trial and absence were

necessary to self-knowledge. The moment you were shut from my sight, I saw the stupendous folly, the guilt, of sacrificing all that could make true happiness for me on earth, to the paltry considerations of expediency. I had sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. I had given love, the life of my life, to fatten an unworthy pride. One day I visited a public show, and saw living doves put into the cages of serpents. I recognized the image of my own sin. I had been feeding *my* doves to serpents! For days the picture was before me; it haunted my sleep; I awoke in groans of agony from the horror of the dream. I had no respite, until I had slain the serpents. I rescued the doves — I opened the cage, — and all with one accord flew joyously through the clear heaven of my soul to you! Now, call me changeable, if you will; reproach me for the wrong I did you; but here I am, obedient, not to any caprice, not to inclination or passion merely, but to the deepest convictions and holiest promptings of my nature!”

Charlotte looked in his eyes. They were pure as the unclouded heavens. They filled her with such strange and perilous sensations, that, alarmed at herself, she turned away.

“But the serpents — I will never give them cause to turn their rage against me!”

“If they had not been killed, I should not be here,” said Hector. “What pledge can I give you? I know of none but that of a life devoted henceforth to you!”

“And that I cannot, you know I cannot accept! Do not torture me more! Think of what I am; think of yourself! Remember your mother, too, she who is so proud of you!”

“If her pride is a true pride,” said Hector, with noble enthusiasm, “she will rejoice that her son had the courage to set his heel upon prejudice and conventionality, and stand by your side, in the face of the world.”

“Your heart is too generous!” replied Charlotte, in a calm, low voice. “Such sentiments cannot be taken into the world and live. An impassable gulf divides us; I feel it, if you do not; and I shudder when you draw me to the brink.”

Hector had expected opposition, but nothing like this. She spoke in fearful earnest ; and he knew it.

“ If you tell me this because you do not love me, I am satisfied. I will not plead one moment. But it is you, now, who are untrue, both to yourself and me.”

She faltered, and her tears fell. He took her in his arms, and she sobbed aloud. It was a moment of intense suffering, suffused with an indefinable happiness, which his mere presence shed about her like dew. But she hastened to recover herself, and put him gently from her.

“ If you did not know your power over me, at least you know it now ! ” she said, with touching pathos. “ But, if you are generous, you will not use it. Whatever weakness I may show, my resolution is unmoved. My future is already planned.”

She spoke of her engagement with Mrs. De Rohan. The reviving joyousness with which she expressed her anticipations of crossing the ocean, and of thus embracing a destiny in which he had no share, filled Hector with insupportable pain. But when she added that she had not forgotten that England was his fatherland, and that when there she should think of him often, he sprang impetuously to his feet.

“ Often ! indeed ! I have no more to say ! I might be satisfied with *often* ! Henceforth my lips are sealed ! O, Charlotte — ” He paused ; the younger Mrs. Longman was at the door.

Hector explained to his relative, with his customary frankness, that he had not come to Montreal on a visit.

“ On arriving home, two nights ago, I learned that Miss Woods had deserted my mother. She was languishing, in her absence ; said I, ‘ I will follow, and bring her back.’ But she has made different arrangements, and all that remains for me is to return alone.”

At this crisis, a note was handed in “ for Miss Woods.” The eagerness with which she opened and read it did not escape Hector’s jealous eye. He judged it to be from Mrs. De Rohan. He was not mistaken ; it was a request for Charlotte to call upon her that morning.

"How long will you be gone?" asked Mrs. Longman.

"Possibly a greater part of the day. I can walk," said Charlotte; "it is not far, and I need the exercise."

"It is too far," said the widow. "Hector shall carry you in the chaise."

Charlotte left the room. She was absent near half an hour, when, returning, with her bonnet and shawl, she placed a letter in Hector's hand.

"If you will give that to your mother—" Her voice was tremulous, her eyes fell, and Hector saw that in her hand she held another letter, which she hesitated to give him.

"I am going with you," he said. "If you prefer to walk, we will walk; but the chaise is at the door."

"As you please," responded Charlotte.

"Do you remember our first ride together," he asked, as he helped her into the chaise. "And the catastrophe, Charlotte? — when you clung to my arm, and our souls knew each other, in the hour of danger? O, what a life-time 'twixt then and now! Then and now!" he repeated, as they rode away. "O, strange, strange experience! And you — you —"

A passion of grief seemed bursting in his voice; but he checked it, and fixed his features firm, and drove on in silence.

"We are close by Mrs. De Rohan's house," said Charlotte, at length. "Speak to me one last kind word, which it will be pleasant to remember, if I should not see you again, will you not?"

"Charlotte!" exclaimed Hector, "we do not part so! You do not know in what an abyss I feel myself sinking at the thought of it. All my bitter-and-sweet experience up to this hour serves but to make a separation unendurable. And now — now — to have your own choice decide against me, to see you depart free and joyous in the pathway of a new existence, in which I have no part; it makes my brain whirl, and my heart burst! Charlotte! it cannot be!"

"You misunderstand me!" said Charlotte; "but I cannot answer you now. I must stop here. This is the house."

"The house will wait for us half an hour."

"No; I will stop now. If you wish to see me again, come, and I will ride back with you."

"Give me that letter you have for me, and I will."

"I wrote it when I did not expect to see you again; but, since you are to call for me—"

"The letter!" exclaimed Hector. She gave it to him. He accompanied her to the door; she entered, and, returning to the chaise, he hid himself in the corner of the seat, and read the letter.

It was the sweetest and yet bitterest morsel his eyes had ever devoured. In the first half Charlotte had expressed a depth, a purity, and intensity of love, in words which came all alive and glowing from her soul. But in the concluding portion she expressed an irrevocable decision to fulfil her engagement with Mrs. De Rohan, and stated peremptory reasons that forbade the very thought of a union with Hector. One page he kissed with passionate fervor; the other he struck and crushed, in the torture which it inflicted. He was still tormenting himself in this manner, when Charlotte reappeared. They rode on for some distance in silence.

"Well," said Hector, at length, "tell me!"

"I cannot tell you what you want me to," replied Charlotte.

"You still hold to the decision expressed in this letter?"

A tremulous "Yes" was the response. "Will you give it back to me?" added Charlotte.

Hector took the letter, and, tearing off the last page, scattered it in fragments upon Charlotte's lap.

"That part is unworthy of you! The rest is dear to me, and I shall keep it."

Another silence. Charlotte gathered up the fragments, and destroyed them.

"Hector," she said, at length, "I am not going with Mrs. De Rohan." Joy leaped in Hector's heart. "Because I cannot," added Charlotte. "Even Providence seems working against me! She has received letters which have decided her to go south, and spend the winter with a brother in Mobile."

At dinner, that day, Hector appeared in his best mood. His cheerfulness, his simple and sweet wisdom, his flashing wit, and the soft splendor of his eye, charmed his relatives. The welcome intelligence that Charlotte would probably remain in the family had rendered them susceptible to the influence; and their appreciation drew Hector on. Their sympathy filled the cup that overflowed again to them. And the fact that Charlotte was herself a listener was to his mind as morning to the lark. For her it sang its loftiest strain, and beat with its joyous wings the golden lattice of heaven. No matter what the conversation was: the topics were various, but every theme he touched, however lowly, — like troughs and swine in the landscape of the artist, — received a ray of the Supreme Beauty. All this without any pedantry or display; but his imagination shed its radiance as it passed, as naturally as the sun. Charlotte never spoke; but, troubled, trembling, happy, her spirit drew near and sat at his feet to listen. After dinner she could not refrain from thanking him for teaching her so much.

“I never heard even you,” she said, “talk like that before.”

“Because,” replied Hector, “when you knew me before, I had not lived the life I have lived since. If we would utter a truth, we must first make it ours by deed and experience.”

Charlotte pondered. Hector was indeed changed. Surely he had set his feet upon chains that fettered him before. A sweet voice within her whispered that here was truth to be trusted, — that here was indeed a noble and heroic love. Had she done justice to herself and him? Was it right that the words he had uttered that morning, thrilling her so, should be turned away, like singing children, from the door of her heart, because she was fearful of thieves? O, too delicious thought, that they might be entertained in the innermost chamber of love’s fond belief!

XXIV.

THE JUDGMENT.

THAT evening, Hector and Charlotte sat conversing in the parlor; Mrs. Longman had withdrawn, and they were left alone. The clock struck nine.

"How the hours fly!" said Hector. "The door-bell takes up the echo,—unwelcome sound!—but, as there can be no persons for us, we will forestall an interruption."

He led the way to a small side-room communicating with the parlor. Scarce had they passed the door, when a servant announced "A gentleman to see Miss Woods." Both started, and murmured, simultaneously, a hated name

"Shall I see him?" asked Charlotte.

"As well now as ever," replied Hector.

A brief delay was necessary for Charlotte to collect her thoughts, and summon strength for the interview. Then, calm, composed, filled with a deep, unruffled happiness, which she had drawn from Hector's presence and sympathy, she entered the parlor and stood before the visitor, waiting for him to speak.

"You will not take my hand?"

No word or motion in reply; but she looked down upon him from her serene height, as if he had been a worm.

"Nor speak to me?" added the visitor, with a struggling desperation in his tone.

The recoiling disgust, the unutterable scorn and pride, with which she regarded him, was her sole response.

"My God!" groaned Robert, in a burst of passion, "I am the most wretched of men! If you would do me a kindness, strike that into my heart!"

He threw himself upon his knees, and, springing open the long bright blade of a dirk-knife, placed its handle in her hand. A wild impulse seized Charlotte; she grasped the weapon. Robert saw the fire kindle in her eye. Her features darkened and contracted; and the next moment, the point was at his breast.

"Do not hesitate! It is the least cruel thing you have done to me, — strike!"

Charlotte flung the weapon behind her, on the floor.

"Arise!" she commanded; "I pity you!"

Robert fell upon his face, and ground his teeth. Suddenly he started up, and, with looks of fury, rushed to clutch the knife. But it had disappeared.

"Give it me! — I will end myself!"

"Poor wretch!" said Charlotte, "you know not what you do! — Why are you here?"

"Because it is my destiny! because I am condemned, and driven, lashed and chained, to this torment! Mrs. Sperkley told me of you, and made me promise not to come; you see how easily I broke my word! It is not because I am apt at perjury; but my love is overwhelming, I am no more my own master. I knew you would scorn me. You have seen in me — you see in me — only the villain; and villain enough I was, and am, God knows! But my love for you has been my greatest fault. It has prompted me to seize you, to hold you, to make you mine forever, at all hazards! Had Hector's possessed half the intensity of mine, he could never have deserted you; he would be now at your feet."

"O — shameful!" exclaimed Charlotte, — "to call your baseless love, to compare yourself with him! — a reptile to an eagle! — when no one act of yours, in all your dealings with me, has been prompted by aught but the most utter and eager selfishness! And now, to speak of LOVE!"

Robert's frame shook. "The conviction that I have brought all this upon myself fills me with red-hot rage! I might have made you my wife, — but a cursed pride restrained me; — and so I appeared all unworthy, as indeed I was! But, since I would now repair that error —"

“Speak not of what you might have done, or of what you would do now! If ever I felt gratitude towards you, I now feel only abhorrence and pity! If this is what you came to hear, it is said, — I can say no more. — Go!”

Robert's face was tortured and dark, his teeth and lips were closed, and his impure eyes burned redly, as he turned and looked around him. Half-stunned, struggling with some inward fury, he seemed to know not what to do. Charlotte left him so, and returned towards the side-room; but, seeing her form about to disappear, he sprang after her, and clasped her hand. With an exclamation of loathing, she flung him off, in the strength of her roused spirit, as if he had been a viper.

“No! no!” he muttered, with fierce determination, pressing towards her again. “I will sooner kill you, and die myself, than leave you so!”

But his arm suddenly fell from her, as if it had been paralyzed. His face grew white.

“Here is your silly toy,” said Hector, displaying the dirk; “and thus do I defeat your villany!” snapping the blade in twain. “But that I shrink from soiling my hands, I could not resist the impulse to hurl you from the window.”

Charlotte trembled with a sort of fearful pride in Hector's power. His address was princely; calm and gracious, yet in its meaning terrible. Still Robert shrank; even his characteristic audacity failed him then.

“Your prophecy has come true,” he said, with a pallid smile “We have met.”

“But we have not parted!” answered Hector. “We have an account together, which may as well be settled now.”

“The sooner the better!” said Robert, doggedly.

“A dark and heavy score is marked against your name, Robert Greenwich! 'T would take too long to read you every item, but the sum total is — VILLANY!”

“How have I wronged you?”

“How have you wronged me? O, outrage against reason! How have you wronged right and truth? How have you wronged *her*?” — and Hector brought Charlotte face to face with him

and looked at both. It was like an angel standing before a fiend and accusing him only by the brightness of purity shining in her face. A lurid vengeance gathered in Robert's visage.

"But that I disdain excuses, I could, by one word, acquit myself towards her!"

Hector smiled: "By all means, speak that word; for, by the same, we may restore lustre to the blackened characters of St. Judas and St. Herod!"

"You are duped!" said Robert. "She has been careful not to tell you what she was — and what I did for her. I will tell you!" — and a devilish exultation gleamed in his eyes. "She was — she is —"

A swift buffet from Hector's palm shattered the word upon his lips. He reeled back against the marble chimney. Charlotte grew pale; but Hector stood calm and smiling before his quivering antagonist.

"Nay, do not clinch your fist, and bite your teeth! I could trample you in the dust! O, villain! dolt! if, in your ignorance of her and me, you imagined I had not heard, from her own true lips, all you would have told me, and more, you rested your purpose of revenge upon foundations false and rotten as your own heart!"

"This blow," uttered Robert, in accents thick and hoarse, the slow blood trickling from his lips, — "'t will be revenged!"

"Revenge it now: I stand before you! But beware! there is a mine of danger in my soul! Take heed how your rash feet approach!"

Robert fumed and choked. "O, you can bluster! you can boast! but —" he smiled a ghastly smile — "we shall meet again!"

"If you desire the happiness, after we part, this night," said Hector, "amen! but we shall see."

"Yes — we shall see! You know me!" said Robert. "I do not forget; I do not sleep upon an injury. Indeed, we shall see!"

He moved towards the door. Hector stepped before him.

"Not yet! — Charlotte, go out and lock us in! We can settle this business best alone."

"There is no key," said Charlotte, pale with apprehension, — "and there are persons in the hall!"

"You mean to stop me?" cried Robert.

"Touch but your hand to me, if you would know how well I mean it! — Charlotte, stay! One word while we are together. There was an affair of a letter. It was somewhat mysterious, and Mr. Greenwich shall explain."

"Stand from the door," said Robert, "or I will not speak one word."

Smiling, and with folded arms, Hector stepped aside. But his eye was alert, and fixed like an eagle's on Robert.

"If it is the letter troubles you so much," faltered the latter, "I pretended to have received one, it is true. *She* will tell you that she gave me no opportunity to set her right upon that point; else I should have done so."

"Before her, then, you confess there was no letter?"

"I took an old one, by chance, from my pocket. It was the caprice of a moment, — to try its effect, — not to deceive her."

"An old one you took by chance from your pocket!" repeated Hector. "A momentary caprice! The artifice was not pre-conceived! Do I understand?"

"Is not my word enough?"

"No! Falsehood can go no further! Look you here!"

And the evidence of Robert's guilt was displayed, in faithful black-and-white, before his astonished eyes. Hector struck the paper.

"A momentary caprice! an unpremeditated artifice! an old chance letter! There is my name, attached to an infamous slander! To debase me in her sight, to drive her to despair, you invented this device. Shift and turn now as you will, — you are in my power, and at my mercy!"

Robert's face was of a cowardly hue; but a stubborn pride sustained him, and he answered, sullenly,

"Well, sir, make the most of it!"

"For the truth's sake, I will! Now, go, if you wish; but I shall go with you. In this house I am a visitor; I do not care to make it the scene of further disturbance, and I know not what

may arrive. There is your hat, which you had forgotten, in your recent haste."

Hector stepped to the side-room. Charlotte followed him, alarmed.

"Do not go out with him!" she pleaded.

"Where is your faith?" said Hector. "I have a solemn lesson for that man, which can be taught only beneath the stars. Fear nothing."

It was easy to say, have faith, and do not fear! But when Charlotte saw the despair and mortal hate in Robert's face, as he went forth, she trembled. Hector pressed her hand at the door, which she held open, and, flinging his cloak about him, walked on by Robert's side. It was a dreary street. The night was dark and the wind whistled; they had soon passed from sight, and the echo of their footsteps died away.

XXV.

TOWARDS MIDNIGHT.

CHARLOTTE remained some minutes at the door. The old trees before the house groaned, and creaked, and tossed their desolate, naked arms, in the blast. The thin, white moon was setting; phantom clouds careered in the sky; the startled stars seemed flying from their spheres. The apparition of a dim, gliding figure, skulking away as she gazed, served to heighten Charlotte's apprehensions. It disappeared in the direction Hector and Robert had taken. Could it be an accomplice of the latter? She ventured out upon the steps; but she strained her eyes in vain to penetrate the darkness, and she shrank back breathless into the hall.

How fearful, at such times, it is to sit alone and wait! How the ear throbs to catch every sound; how awful the silence; how dreary the moan of the wind! Charlotte, alone in the parlor, listened till the air seemed all alive with invisible intelligences, that hovered to and fro, that groaned in the chimney, that sighed beneath the tables, that ticked in the wall, that clattered at the casement, and tapped, with elfish laughter, on the panes. Twice she thought she heard distant pistol-shots. An hour dragged by, each moment heaping its weight upon her anxious mind. Two hours elapsed. Surely, surely, some evil had arrived to Hector; else he would return. She divided the time 'twixt gazing from the window, listening at the door, walking nervously up and down, and lying upon the sofa, with her face buried in her hands.

She was on the point of seeking the family, to inform them of the cause of her alarm, when she heard an approaching tread. She flew to the window; she recognized the welcome cloak and hat. She was at the door in an instant.

"O, Hector! I was never glad" — till *now*, she would have added; but her voice died in her throat. What new suspense was this? With the sombre cloak thrown across his chest, muffling his face, he stood motionless upon the threshold.

"Hector! why is this? Come in!"

Still muffled in the cloak, he entered without speaking, and moved slowly towards the room in which the lamp was burning. Charlotte uttered a cry.

"You are not Hector!"

The figure turned, and stood regarding her from beneath the shadow of the hat. The hat was certainly Hector's; likewise the cloak; but the form, the step, the manner — how changed! Charlotte waited for a word or look of explanation. A solemn obeisance; then the hat was slowly raised, and the folds of the cloak fell from the hidden face.

"Edward!"

Another stately bow from the hat and cloak.

"Your majesty!"

"Where is Hector?"

"Five fathoms deep, where the salamanders sleep! — I inquired for the Duchess of Dingleland, and they said she had gone to the moon. With rings on her fingers, and bells on her toes, that she may have music wherever she goes. Quippe!"

And the prime minister, pirouetting on his left foot, whirled three times, and stood before Charlotte, solemn and stately as ever.

"Edward! Edward! do not do so!"

"The other way?" — And, pirouetting on his right foot, he turned thrice in the opposite direction, and stood facing her, as before. "There shall be dancers in our kingdom. Dancers, prancers, and the light fantastic toe. As a religious exercise, only. I am the centre of the universe: when I turn, all creation whirls!"

"O! tell me, Edward! where is Hector?"

"There are some in rags, and some in shags, and some in velvet gowns!" Edward distended the wings of the mantle. "This is princely costume. When the warrior falls, his pockets are

plundered. And nobody knows that he lies there, but his hawk, and his hound, and his ladye-fair."

"He has been hurt!" cried Charlotte.

"The new moon was just over the old church steeple. It looked like a rind of cheese on a toasting-fork. We'll have three moons in our kingdom,—one yellow, one white, and one pea-green. Since the duchess has gone to the moon, the man in the moon will be henpecked. The sparrow's cap was in the trap, the cat came creeping after,—pounce! they'll tell you the remainder of the history, when they bring in the feathers."

"Edward!" articulated Charlotte; "dear Edward!—"

"The deer is a superb creature; and to all such we'll give encouragement. We'll set a premium on fair women, too; and Sheba shall swarm with them. But, if there be any more beautiful than your majesty, they shall wear veils. 'T would peril man's salvation. I have had experience, and can testify for the race.—Who comes there?—Stand and deliver!"

It was Mrs. Longman, whom Charlotte had summoned by the bell. She regarded Edward with astonishment, having all this time believed him asleep in his chamber. She looked to Charlotte for an explanation, and imbibed her fears, with quick sympathy, when the terrified girl spoke of Hector.

"Hector was a Trojan," said Edward. "He was chased three times around the walls, when—chuck! Achilles cracked him over! Achilles' wrath, to grace the direful spring of woes unnumbered—Andromache was a widow."

"How did you leave the house?"

"Not by the front threshold. A slimy thing had crept over!"

"Why did you go out?"

"To look after the prince. He lacks attendants, and his state is beggarly.—Solemn times,—when alligators walk on two feet, and carry murder in their bosoms!"

"Was there a quarrel?"

"The cat will play, and after slay!" Edward made a horridly suggestive gesture, by drawing his hand, with a gurgling sound, across his throat. "Beards shall grow long in our kingdom: razors being dangerous!"

"Edward," said Mrs. Longman, kindly, but seriously, "this will not do. See! you distress Charlotte, who has been so good to you!"

"Hark to the story!" — Charlotte and the widow listened. —
"T is short and sweet:

Robin's wife twelve jewels did wear, —
Three on her bosom, and nine in her hair ;
But the jewel more precious than any, said I,
Not all Robin's riches are equal to buy.

She lacked virtue. Hence the elopement; and Robin lost her and her jewels. I know she is called a duchess; but the man is not her husband. The ten commandments are ten-pins, which Satan bowls down with the ball of temptation. Since one has been broken so often, there now exist but nine. When one falls, the others topple. Set 'em up, Reverend! In our kingdom there shall be a new system of virtue; which will come through the exaltation of our lives, and our devotion to old cheese. Green cheese, innocence; old cheese, virtue; curd is simplicity, — and development is exhibited under the form of a cheese-press. There's whey, — that's weakness; mould, — excessive morality; and bigotry breeds maggots."

Charlotte knew not what to do. Perhaps it was her own excitement that provoked Edward's wildness; but, whatever the cause, she appeared to have lost all influence over him. Evading her questions, he continued to declaim on all sorts of odd subjects, disconnected, yet not without some subtle ratiocination of his own, jumbling together fragments of sense and nonsense, with occasionally a bright gleam of wisdom, shown momentarily, like rays of diamond flashing from heaps of rubbish. His mind seemed like some excellent book, with its pages disarranged and torn, and its index lost. In vain Charlotte attempted to restore order among the leaves. The widow's attempts to assist but rendered matters worse, and the young girl was ready to weep in utter despair, when the sound of wheels at the door sent a thrill to her heart. She flew to open it.

There was a rustling, a fluttering, a few stifled and hurried

words; and the new comer, with a handkerchief bound upon his head, and with Charlotte, trembling, laughing, weeping, upon his arm, marched into the room.

“Ho! Prince of Egypt!” cried Edward, sitting grave and immovable in the borrowed hat and cloak. “Was it thou in the carriage? Carriages are of the earth, earthy. Railroads are intellectual; but when spiritual laws are understood, men will navigate the air. Meanwhile, majesty creeps.”

“’T was a pretty trick you played me!” exclaimed Hector.

“Her majesty’s faith was tested, and she proved herself worthy. The Seven Wise Men have been discoursing.”

“The Seven Wise Men are dead,” said Hector; “and dead men, to be consistent, should speak only the dead languages. Reconcile that!”

“There’s a wisdom that disdains logic; and we know more than we understand. My feet are ice; but my head is thawed; for the moon came down and kissed me with her fiery lips. — If ever I marry,” — Edward’s manner changed to airy lightness, — “’t is the moon shall be my bride! for she is lovely and lonely; and so she has told me many a night; and I reach out my hand, and pat her cheek. She smiles! I love the moon, and she loves me! For nine days, I was Lord Bacon; since then, I am Shakspeare, and my moods are poetical. What do you think?”

“I think,” said Hector, “you are no great Shaks.”

“The stars shall come to the wedding. One bright-eyed little fellow winked at me to-night, — he knows! — But —” in a hoarse whisper — “I’ll be married in HELL! No cold feet there! and your majesty shall grace the nuptials. Satan reigns; but he’s on a visit to the grogshops, and we’ll use his imps for camp-stools.”

“When may we expect the ceremony?”

“When the world is righted. At present, it’s upside down. The coachman is harnessed, and the horses ride and drive. Necessity has got the whip, and even Genius must skip. The soul is servant to a trade, and worships what his hands have made. The mastiff gravely sits at table; the farmer watches barn and stable. The mule is mounted on the man. The miserable African is tyrant o’er the Southern master. The proud flock

leads the abject pastor ; the wily shepherd cheats the sheep. Many sow who never reap, many reap who never sow ; the devil laughs, and so we go ! Heigh-ho ! ”

“ Be calm,” Hector said to Charlotte and Mrs. Longman, “ and in a little while he will become so. That ’s a bad state of affairs you describe.”

“ Good is at the heart of all things ; evil is the shuck. The true commandment is not, ‘ Shun evil,’ but ‘ Love the good ; ’ then evil shall go from you by the law of magnetic repulsion. Evil with good hath close connection, and vice is virtue’s imperfection ; desire is the root of love ; and sinning, piety’s germinal beginning ! In Sheba, all philosophy shall be promulgated by the prime minister ; and it shall be taught in rhymes, Shakspeare inspiring. If there is any problem to solve, propose it.”

“ One thing,” observed Hector : “ with so many people to sleep for, I don’t see how you can afford to sit up so late. I’ve no objection to your stealing my beaver ; but don’t rob Shakspeare of his nap. The wise men grow drowsy ; and it’s my opinion you’d better go to bed.”

“ The counsel is salutary ; though I yield,” said Edward, graciously, “ not to the man, but to the prince.”

“ Will you come, then ? ” asked Mrs. Longman.

“ Sweet Sal, you are irresistible ! ” Edward adjusted the cloak to the shoulders of a plaster Byron in the corner, placing the hat upon the summit. “ I was naked, and you clothed me,” turning to Hector ; “ therefore, you shall hold high rank in our kingdom. But do not flatter her majesty, for that puts coldness between us. Your coming has brought trouble ; and we are not what we were. Heigh-ho ! and I can’t but grieve, the good old days of Adam and of Eve ! The words may seem puerile, but there’s meaning concealed. Adam was the first man, Eve was the t’ other ; Cain was a wicked man, ’ca’se he killed his brother ! Crack the nut, and the meat is palpable.”

“ Well, good-night ! ”

“ Bear witness ! ” said Edward, solemnly. “ You are three,—tit, tat, to, three in a row ! And I do here declare and affirm before you, that, all envy aside, I bid her majesty a fair good-

night, and peaceful dreams and slumbers light! I make my bow, as the oak said; I take leave of you, answered the wind, with a whisk; and so the centre of the universe withdraws."

With a profound reverence, he went backwards out of the room; but, appearing to consider something still required to render his exit impressive, he returned, and, putting his head in at the door, said, "Peep-bo!" with a cunning leer, designed, undoubtedly, as the most effective-diplomatic stroke of the evening.

"What a fright I have had!" said Charlotte. "How did he get your hat and cloak?"

"I loaned them to him. He came after us, bareheaded, and thinly clad; I was afraid that, in his feeble state, he would suffer from the cold; and, as my blood was up, I could very well dispense with the extra clothing. I advised him to keep near me; but the temptation to play fantastic tricks in my garments was, it seems, too great to be resisted."

"And Robert?"

"O, humanity!" exclaimed Hector; "thou art a riddle!"

"You did not quarrel?"

"No; he acknowledged his wrongs, and made the most solemn promises for the future."

"O, Hector! how could you bring him to that point?"

"It was not I, but the truth. But do not count too much upon his promises. The evil spirit in him, though humbled, is not killed. He will not trouble us soon, however, I think; he knows whom he has to deal with. He is engaging in speculations with Mr. Sporkley, and has pledged himself not to go back to Huntersford. So there remains nothing to hinder your return with me to-morrow."

"But the danger, — should he choose to take revenge! Here, I am safe —"

"And there you will be safe; for a time, at least. My mother is dying for you; I will leave you with her, and go at once to forestall all danger, by striking at the very root of his power."

"O, that will be too much to do for me!"

"I cannot do too much for you, Charlotte. Your peace and happiness are the jewels of my life. If money and time can purchase

them, I will account them cheap. Were it not for my mother, I would not ask you to return. But we must go to her ; and while she lives, there we must live, before the world, free from all apprehension of evil, and in the face of prejudice."

An almost fearful sense of happiness suffused Charlotte's entire being. Could it be real ? Would she not soon awake, and weep for her vanished dreams ?

"But, even if this should be, could not the affair be accomplished without a journey ?"

"Possibly. But I should tremble to intrust so sacred a business to any indifferent person."

"And your mother," said Charlotte, — "we owe it to her, — to seek her sympathy and counsel. Go to her ; tell her all ; keep nothing back ; then, if she permits it, if she desires it, I will return !"

XXVI.

MOTHER AND SON.

HECTOR's absence, the loss of Charlotte, and manifold minor troubles of a domestic nature, had produced their effect upon Mrs. Dunbury. Her old physician had been recalled; solemn medical attendance filled the place of the spiritual stimulus for which her spirit famished; and prescriptions became the order of the day — and night.

It was difficult to have a "girl." Bridget's strong arms could embrace the head and front of the household work, but a gentler hand and lighter foot than hers were required in the invalid's chamber. Bertha Wing was recently married, and had a household of her own to engage her cares. Mr. Fosdick's daughters might possibly have been had, but Mrs. Dunbury preferred any other attendance. As a last resort, Phoebe Jackwood was sent for, who could come over "for a few days," she said, "just for accommodation." Phoebe came accordingly. It was a day or two before Hector's unexpected return; and his sudden departure for Canada had left her once more alone with his mother.

The novelty and importance of the mission pleased Phoebe's girlish heart, and she exerted herself to fulfil it to the invalid's comfort and satisfaction. Her efforts were well appreciated; Mrs. Dunbury was grateful; but Phoebe's touch, Phoebe's step, Phoebe's voice, were not the touch, the step, the voice, she loved. She pined for Charlotte. Hector had become almost a secondary consideration. Her experience with friends of her own sex had all her life been unsatisfactory. Never until the past summer had she known a woman's heart that drew out all her sympathies. Perhaps she loved Charlotte through her son; but, whatever the

influence, she had found in her a charm which she had found in no other, and which now arose fragrant in her memory, until to sense it, breathe it again, became the desire and longing of her life.

Hector had been two days absent. On the afternoon of the third day, Corny put his head in at the door.

"There 's someb'dy comin' up the road, Mrs. Dunb'ry. I guess it 's Hector."

"O, Phœbe, run and see!"

Phœbe ran; Phœbe returned, joyous.

"It is Hector! I know his cloak!"

"Is *she* with him?"

"There 's somebody with him. If it 's Charlotte, she 's got a new bonnet. They 're in Mr. Simpkins's wagon; he 's brought 'em over from the railroad. It is Charlotte!" cried Phœbe, at the window. "No, it an't, either! It may be, though, — she 's behind the driver, and I can't see."

A minute later, Hector's foot was on the floor; Hector's arms supported the invalid, as she arose from her pillow.

"And Charlotte?"

"Charlotte is safe and well."

"The new bonnet was Ann Carter!" exclaimed Phœbe, disappointed.

"Good Phœbe," said Hector, "I want to talk with my mother a little while; will you let me?"

"The doctor says she is to be kept very quiet," replied the wise Phœbe.

"O, I 'll look to that! And will you be so kind as to take away, for a few minutes, the charm of your presence, which will be all the fresher and sweeter, when you again favor us with it?"

Phœbe, with exquisite simplicity: "Do you mean you would like to have me leave the room? O, I 'll do that! Why did n't you say so? Mrs. Dunbury is to take two table-spoonfuls of that in the bottle —"

"I 'll attend to the bottle;" and, following Phœbe to the door Hector locked it after her.

"Ah, mother!" then said he, seating himself by the bed, "this bridge of life we tread upon is a bridge of sighs! But it is worth the crossing, is it not? It is through suffering that the depths of our nature are stirred, and existence made great and glorious."

"O, yes, yes!" responded the invalid. "But why do you tell me this?"

"By way of preamble, mother. A confession and a history follow."

"And — Charlotte?"

"Be patient; you shall hear of her; for I cannot show you my heart, without revealing her image."

"I am glad!"

"Before I have finished, perhaps you will be sorry!"

He scarce knew how to proceed. His mother was too feeble to endure a sudden shock. He told of the love and happiness which he thought might be his; and when all her sympathies were stirred, and joy and faith made her strong, he turned and denounced those false estimates of society, by which love and happiness are so often frustrated. She assented to all he said.

"But, consider!" he cried; "of two persons who love thus deeply, one may be descended from princes, from Jove himself, while the other is the child of misery and shame!"

"We must not forget that Christ was born in a manger," breathed the invalid.

"Glorious thought! Dear mother, when you speak that sacred name, my whole being is infused with ineffable emotion! One night, in my absence from you and Charlotte, one strange, memorable night, when I lay thinking of the world, of life, a great power came upon me; an overshadowing, an agony, and a light; then to my inner sense a universe was opened, in the midst of which I saw humanity transfigured, — the image of the Father shining through the Son, and the dove of the Spirit flying to mankind from his bosom of love. In the light that dawned upon me then, I have seen all the circumstances of birth, of wealth, of station, as utterly insignificant to the true being and majesty of the soul. O, yes, Christ, whom now all the enlightened world adores, in costly temples, was born in a manger; and the instrument of his ignomin-

ious death has become the universal symbol of the world's salvation ! If we believe in him, how can we at the same time rest our faith upon the externals of society ? Yet let us not forget that we are considering vital truths, and that we have nothing to do with fine theories, that cannot be woven into our lives."

"I know, my son, we are uttering social heresies, but let the truth be spoken ; then, if we have strength and courage, let us live it !"

"Mother, for one born and bred in English society, where the prejudice of clan and caste is as potent as in India, you talk marvellously ! It is well for you to have suffered from change of fortune, from privation and humiliation, from mental and bodily anguish, since every tear your eyes have shed has fallen a pearl of wisdom into your lap ! Imagine, now, that I have a dear, sweet flower ; I bring it to you ; shall we stop to consider in what soil it sprung, before enjoying its fragrance and beauty ?"

"O, no ; but love it for its own sake, for what it is !"

"Nobly answered !" exclaimed Hector. "It may be found among wretched weeds ; it may have drank poisonous dews ; its stalk may have been broken, and its leaves trodden under rude and swinish feet. Am I to cast it from me ? Or am I to cherish it all the more choicely, for that innate purity, which none of those influences could destroy ?"

"You are to cherish it, my son, with all your heart and soul !"

Hector bent down, and as he kissed his mother she felt a warm tear fall upon her cheek.

"But, if the possession of this flower brings upon me the shame of the world, and the hatred and persecution of those who broke its stalk and bruised its leaves, — tell me, what then ?"

"O, my son, I tremble ! — but be you brave, and noble, and strong !"

"And if that flower were — Charlotte ?"

No response ; but the invalid wept, and, straining Hector to her bosom, responded, fervently,

"Then God help you and her !"

XXVII.

THE FOREST ROAD.

ON the edge of the town of Huntersford was a railway-station, consisting simply of a platform of hemlock-boards, erected upon a sand-hill, in a lonely and barren spot, which the corporation had not seen fit to decorate with a "dépôt."

One cold and windy afternoon, late in November, a long, dark train of cars flew smoking and whizzing to the foot of the platform, and stopped. Two passengers were landed, with their baggage, and, once more the mighty monster of steam twanging his terrible cross-bow, the arrowy train sped on, thundering with faint and fainter echoes among the hills. The two passengers looked around in astonishment. A moment since they were in the midst of a little, crowded world of human life. Now they stood upon a solitary hill, alone; the train out of sight; not a human being visible; no habitation near; but all around the earth looked desolate and cold, under its crust of snow.

"This rather takes one's breath away! Four miles from home, and no vehicle at hand! It is a cold welcome I have prepared for you, my poor girl — is it not?"

"I am content as long as you are with me," — and a smile of trustful affection played, like sunshine, over the speaker's face. "But isn't there some mistake? Have we stopped at the right place?"

"It's the right place, — but there is a blunder somewhere. I think Corny must have been sent for us; and if he were told to come to this station, he would be sure to find some other. What shall we do? — wait here, or walk?"

Hector looked all around. The prospect was discouraging. No

shelter, no means of conveyance, and no path in the direction they were to travel, but a rough wagon-track cut through the crusty snow. Added to this, night was setting in, and the place was disagreeably suggestive of wolves.

"I must confess myself, for once in my life, completely puzzled ! If we wait here, there is a fine prospect of freezing. If we walk on, we may miss the wagon, should it come by the other road. I was never more fully persuaded that it is my duty to be vexed !"

"That will be a good plan," replied Charlotte, "if it will bring the wagon."

"It is growing dark very fast," said Hector. "I think, before it is too late, I will make an excursion into the hollow, and see what I can discover."

"Let me go with you !"

"Are you afraid to stay alone ?"

"No, not afraid ; but let me go with you."

"Dear child, the road will be rough for these tender feet of yours ; but I will not leave you for a moment. We will stay or go together."

Until now Charlotte had managed to wear a cheerful aspect ; but when Hector, talking to her so kindly and affectionately, made her sit down upon a piece of baggage, and warmed her cold feet in his hands, she could no longer repress her tears.

"Forgive me !"

"Forgive you, indeed ! You have a right to cry," said Hector, looking up into her face.

"It is as much for happiness as for anything else," replied Charlotte, through her tears. "You are so good to me !"

"So good ! when I have brought you out here in the wilderness, as if to perish ! This, too, at a time when your path should be all strewn with flowers !"

"It is nothing, since you are with me ! But, O, Hector ! I have all along seen a dark shadow before me, in the direction of Huntersford."

"A shadow ? how ?"

"A foreboding of something to happen to us both. O, it is

not this, — but this seems a forerunner of disappointments sent to warn us. You think me weak, I know.”

“Not weak, brave girl! if, when the disappointments come, you are strong to bear them.”

“With you to assure me of this, how can I be unhappy?” responded Charlotte, with a beaming look.

They left the baggage on the platform, and walked to the foot of the acclivity. Beyond was the bed of Wild River, which flowed through chasms and gorges among the hills. The road they were to follow led along its banks, on the borders of an old forest, whose deep silence was broken only by the voice of the pouring waters. Wagons had passed when the earth was soft; it was now frozen, and the way appeared toothed with irregular, sharp clods of ice. It was painful for Charlotte to proceed; but, fortunately, the distance was not long through the woods, and on the other side was a small village, where a conveyance could be procured. Hector cheered his companion with this prospect; but before they had gone far they heard the sound of a wagon. Then somebody cracked a whip in the woods, and said, “Go ’long!” The voice was unmistakable.

“Mr. Jackwood!”

“Hello!” cried the farmer, pulling up his horse. “That you, Hector Dunbury? Ye got Cha’lotte Woods with ye, too, han’t ye? How d’e du, Cha’lotte?”

Charlotte submitted her hand to the hearty grasp of the farmer, who got out of his wagon to greet her.

“I’m glad enough to see ye agin! Got tired o’ waitin’, didn’t ye? I was jes’ goin’ over to the railroad arter yc. I ca’-c’lated I was goin’ to be a leetle late.”

“Where is father?” asked Hector.

“O! your father — he’s met with a bit of an accident to-day, I’m sorry to say.”

“An accident!”

“P’raps you’d better not git in till I turn about,” suggested Mr. Jackwood. “T’an’t a very comf’table place to turn in; I shall haf to cramp and back.”

He stepped to the horse's head, and, holding the bridle with both hands, commenced turning very slowly and carefully.

"What has happened at home?" demanded Hector.

"Look an' see if I'm backin' against that 'ere stump," cried the farmer. "I thought I should jes' graze it. If it's in the way, sing out."

"You are all right. Start up a little now," said Hector.

"Hold! Come, Charlotte."

They got up into the wagon; and Mr. Jackwood, placing a board, with a woolly sheep-skin upon it, across the box before them, as a seat for himself, gathered up his reins and whip, and drove back through the woods.

"That's a terrible awk'ard place to stop at, where you come," — turning his head so as to throw his voice behind him, and at the same time to keep an eye on his horse. "Unless ye have a team to meet ye, ye might as well be set down in Egypt. I'll git ye home quick as I can, then go back arter yer baggage."

Hector interrupted him, to ask again about the accident.

"Wal," said Mr. Jackwood. "I thought best to let your narves git settled a leetle mite, 'fore I told ye. It's as well as any way to take sich things easy-like, ye know. Yer father was goin' over to East Huntersford with a load o' grain; I guess 't was 'bout 'leven o'clock when he drove by my house; me and Bim'lech was haulin' a leetle jag o' wood to the door, an' I should judge it could n't ben much arter 'leven, if 't was at all. I ruther thought Mr. Dunbury was takin' his produce over to the East, so I hailed him; for I'd heerd him say a man there had offered some three cents on a bushel more 'n they give in the village, to have it delivered at the railroad. He stopped to talk a little while, an' it struck me he had on too much of a load. Says I, 'An't you 'fraid you've got more 'n your team 'll git along 'ith comf'tbly?' says I. He said no, he guessed not; he had jes' so much grain to spare, an' he thought 't was better to take it all one load, than make two bites to a cherry. 'Of course,' said I, 'you know a good deal the best about it,' says I; 'but, if 't was mine, I should feel jest the least mite ticklish 'bout that 'ere off hoss. When Wing owned him,' says I, 'he had a bad trick of frettin'

when a load troubled him ; p'tic'larly when he started with 't ; an sometimes,' says I, 'he 'd git spunky, and would n't draw at all.' Your father said he 'd broke him o' that trick, he guessed. 'If so,' says I, 'I should n't be 'fraid of a middlin' kind o' load, like that 'ere. My team would n't think nothin' on 't.' But I noticed, when he started, the off hoss acted kind o' ugly ; he jerked, an flinched, as though the collar hurt his breast, — jes' 's he use' to, when Wing owned him, for all the world. But I thought I would n't say nothin' more, though I'm sorry now I did n't ; for it 'pears Mist' Dunbury had n't more 'n got to the railroad crossin', when the pesky beast made a fuss agin, an' balked, with the load right acrost the track. I never 'd let a team stop that way ; I 'd git 'em off the track, somehow ; if they would n't go ahead, I 'd made 'em back, if there was any back to 'em ! But prob'bly Mr. Dunbury didn't think o' that. Wal, sir," said Mr. Jackwood, turning almost entirely around, and demonstrating to his listeners with his hands, "there he was when the cars come. The man 't told me the story see 'em, an' yelled out ; but your father was prob'bly doin' his best, an' could n't do no more, to save the nation. I asked the man, says I, 'Why didn't you help,' says I, 'instid o' standin' there an' hollerin', when hollerin' could n't do no good ?' says I. But he said he had a skittish hoss to hold, an' he did n't dare to leave him a minit, when the ingine was in sight. I thought it a kind o' milk-an'-water excuse, but I did n't say nothin' ; the hoss was stole, an' there wan't no use lockin' the barn-door. Wal, sir," repeated Mr. Jackwood, warming as he approached the catastrophe, "the cars come ! My — informer" — he appeared to hesitate a little about making use of so elegant a word — "told me 't was the awfulest sight he ever see. He no more expected to find Mist' Dunbury alive than — Wal, he 'd no idee on 't ! But the cars did n't hit him, mind ye. He was jest untacklin' the team, to git 'em out o' the way, when the ingine struck. He was insenseless when they took him up, but he turned out to be not half so much hurt as everybody thought for. They brought him home, this arternoon, an' I guess he's doin' as well as could be expected. What was queer, the cars wan't thrown off the track ; they ripped right through the wagon,

like a streak ! The horses wan't hurt, nuther, — strange to say Mist' Dunbury had got 'em unhitched jes' 't the minute the ingine struck. They was too mad to be scart, I imagine, or else they 'd a' started 'ith the wagon when the whistle blowed ; but they did n't, an' when the cars come up, they run right agin the nearest fence, an' stopped. If 't had been my team, they 'd stripped their harnesses and gone to Jericho. On the hull, it seems a providential escape, an' we've every reason to feel thankful 't wan't no wus," he added, by way of moral ; " though, I mus say, 't was a hard rub for the wagon, an' it made dre'ful bad work with the grain ! "

XXVIII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

CHARLOTTE could not have returned to her old home under more disheartening circumstances. It was like entering a hospital. Mr. Dunbury lay groaning with his injuries, and the shock of the accident had thrown his feeble and fast-failing wife into a low and perilous state.

But Charlotte bore up bravely, and her cheerful demeanor carried an energizing influence to the spirit of her old friend.

"My dear child," said the invalid to her, one day, with grateful emotion, "how shall I ever repay you for all your sacrifices?"

"O! if you could only know how richly I feel repaid! These are the sweetest and happiest days of my whole life!"

The invalid could not doubt it. Hector was at Charlotte's side; and day and night, with enduring love and patience, hand in hand they administered to the wants of the sufferers. It mattered not how severe their duties were; the exchange of a look or word, as they met for an instant, in passing from room to room, or at the bedside of either of the patients, compensated for all.

"O, Charlotte!" Hector would say, with a smile of ineffable meaning; and no answer so cheering and sweet as the glance of her lustrous eyes. Then there were the watches of the night, when sleep and quiet reigned, and they could steal away from their almost incessant cares, and sit together undisturbed, conversing low, or keeping hallowed silence, in the still hours.

One of these memorable nights found them in Mrs. Dunbury's room. She was sleeping in the mild shade of the bed-curtains, while a profound and measured breathing, issuing through the open door of the adjoining sick chamber, marked Mr. Dunbury's

heavy slumbers. All was quiet; Charlotte, wearied with the toils of the day, reclined upon the lounge; and Hector sat near, shading her eyes from the light. Suddenly he observed a slight start, and a cessation of her breath.

"You were dreaming," he said, leaning over her.

It was some seconds before she spoke. — "Did you see that face?"

"A face? Where?"

"At the window. Do not stir; it may come again."

They waited several minutes. Both watched, but saw nothing. "Are you sure there was a face?"

"I saw it plainly! It peered in between the curtains. But it vanished."

"Do not be alarmed," said Hector; for Charlotte trembled.

"I am not; but it gave me a start! There is scarcely anything more frightful than such an apparition at a window by night. The darkness and mystery —" Another tremor, and Charlotte's hand pressed Hector's arm.

"Again?" he whispered.

"It passed by the casement!"

"I was looking, but saw nothing."

"The lamp shines in your eyes," said Charlotte. "I saw the outline distinctly."

"Sit still," — and Hector arose softly. "I will try what discoveries I can make."

"You will not leave the house?"

"I do not know."

He left his lamp in the kitchen, and, muffling himself in his cloak, went silently from the house. The heavens were starless; but the snow upon the ground gave a faint glimmer to the night. Hector moved cautiously towards the front yard, watching and listening. He heard nothing, saw no living object. He advanced to the trees, and, passing through the open gate, looked up and down the road. No discovery. After some minutes, he gave up the search; but, as he turned to retrace his steps, he perceived a movement by the trunk of one of the large trees. He rushed to the spot, and a man stepped out before him. Hector was no cow-

ard ; but, it must be confessed, the promptness with which he was met gave his blood a start.

"Good-evening, sir," said he. The figure stood silent and motionless. "I said good-evening. It is politeness to return a salutation. What is your business here?"

The same silence and mystery. A deep determination swelled in Hector's tones. "Though you have no tongue, you have, at least, a face! If I cannot hear the one, I'll see the other!" Still no answer; and Hector laid his hand upon the figure's arm. "Will you speak? If not—there is the house, and you shall march into it! You'll find it is no jest!"

His grasp tightened; but at the instant he was shaken off, and the man sprang upon him. He was not unprepared, but the suddenness of the onset caused him to recoil. As he did so, with a dexterous movement he cast off his cloak, and flung it, outspread, full into the face of his antagonist; then, while the latter was beating it off, he seized him by the middle, lifted him clear from his feet, and hurled him with all his might upon the ground.

The snow was not deep; yet it was sufficient to break the force of the fall. And now the cloak, which had previously embarrassed the assailant, did him excellent service. While he fell upon one part of it, he managed to twist the opposite corner about Hector's face and chest. The struggle was violent. Both regained their feet together; and the assailant, literally tearing himself from Hector's embrace, fled with all speed down the road. Hector did not pursue, but, gathering up his cloak, returned to the house. At the door he was met by the alarmed and eager Charlotte. She suppressed a cry of pain. His face was streaked with blood.

"I cannot be much hurt," said he, "since I did not know it. I received a slight brush in carrying away this trophy."

"What is it?"

"It hath the appearance of a coat-button, with a strip of cloth attached, like unto a comet with a tail. It belongs to the face you saw at the window. You look frightened; but there's no occasion."

“Who was it?”

“You can guess as well as I. Not a word could I force from the villain; and his intention evidently was, to knock me down, then make his escape. I know of but one man who could have any possible motive for prowling around our windows. I imagine how a jealous rage might prompt him to the act, even with no definite purpose in view.”

“But his promises —”

“They would not be the first he has broken. However sincere he may have been in making them, he is a slave to passion, and there is no faith to be placed in him. O,” said Hector, “had it not been for my father’s accident, all danger from him would be by this time at an end, and you should stand by my side before the world! — But don’t be troubled. I will know to-morrow.”

On the following day, Hector made an errand to the village, but sought in vain for any clue of intelligence which might lead to a solution of the mystery. On his way home, however, stopping to make some purchases at the store, he encountered a poor tailor, who had his shop in an obscure street of the town.

“How do you do, Peter?”

“O, how do you do?” said Peter, obsequiously. “You are ever so much a stranger!”

“How is business, this winter?”

“O, not over ’n above bright! Give me a call. I don’t do a very smashing business, but my work is done well.”

“So I have heard,” replied Hector; “and the first I have to be done in town shall be given to you.”

“Thank you!” said Peter.

“You are looking at some buttons. Let me help you choose them. What sort of a button do you want?”

“A good over-coat button,” said Peter. “Something about this size and quality,” — showing an exact mate to the trophy Hector had brought off the night before.

“That’s a handsome button!”

“It’s a good and durable article,” answered Peter, professionally. “I’ve an assortment of these; but I’m doing a job for a fan-

ciful customer,—he wants something different; and, in consequence of one being lost from his coat, I'm to change the whole set."

"If I knew your customer," said Hector, "I might tell you just what article he would fancy."

"Of course," returned Peter, softly, "there'll be no harm in mentioning it, though he appeared a little sensitive about having it known 't he'd come back to town, or 't I was doing his work. It's Robert Greenwich."

"Indeed!" said Hector. "Then here is just the button. Give him a set of these, by all means!"

He chose the device of a serpent biting its own coils. Peter admired the selection, and declared that he should abide by it.

"He shall wear serpentine buttons, and have me to thank for it!" said Hector to himself. "Meanwhile, I must take out his fangs."

He visited a banking office, where he had money deposited, and procured a draft upon New York; then hastened home to Charlotte. "It is as I feared. Robert is in town. But don't be disturbed. My resolution is formed."

"You will go?" said Charlotte, pale with anxiety.

"Yes — at once. I have delayed too long. Be brave, Charlotte! — I must speak with father."

Mr. Dunbury was sitting up, with his feet upon a chair, and his unfortunate shoulder in a sling, when Hector entered the room. "What orders have you for me to-day, father?"

"None, that I know of." Mr. Dunbury's voice sounded like a growl. Hector was not surprised; for he had not heard him speak pleasantly since his accident.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"No. I am better. I can wait upon myself. It is time I was doing something. I have been here long enough."

"You could not have chosen a better time," said Hector, "for there is little to be done on the farm; scarce enough to keep Corny in motion. It is as much as you ought to do to oversee things, where you think there is need. Could you confine yourself to this, in case I should leave you for a few days?"

"At all events, I can dispense with your services, if that is what you wish."

"You misunderstand me, father. I never did anything more cheerfully than what I have had to do for you. Has it appeared otherwise?"

There was a thrill of emotion in Hector's voice, which softened his parent. "I acknowledge you have shown me all the kindness I have deserved. More, perhaps; for I have not been patient; I have given you cause to abandon me."

"I have had no thought of abandoning you — no wish to leave you for a day. But I have other duties to perform. I should have gone about them within three days of my return from Canada, with Charlotte, had it not been for your accident. It has not been without misgivings that I have neglected them; and now circumstances render it imperative that they should be attended to, at once."

"You do not see fit to impart your business to me."

"I cannot very well do so until my return; because it is not altogether my own."

"Whose, then?"

"So much I can tell you, but let it be in confidence; it is Charlotte's!"

"Charlotte's, — hem!" muttered Mr. Dunbury, with a clouded brow. "I do not understand Charlotte. She came here a servant. One would think now she was mistress of the house."

"Father," replied Hector, "this is a subject we will not argue. You know that my mother's welfare required that she should be here; and it was by your consent, if not by your desire, that I went for her. She yielded to our entreaties; but it was at a sacrifice of peculiar advantages her Canadian home afforded; and, in return, I promised to transact the personal business of hers to which I have alluded. I have now to fulfil my promise. On my return you shall know everything."

"When do you leave?"

"To-morrow; and I may be absent two or three weeks."

"Very well," muttered Mr. Dunbury.

His countenance showed a sullen discontent; but he gave the subject no more words; and it only remained for Hector to make preparations for his journey.

XXIX.

THE GREENWICH FAMILY.

IN a small, old-fashioned apartment, with a tall chest of drawers, with brass handles, on one side, a suspended book-case on the other, and an ancient clock, with weights and pendulum swinging almost to the floor, in the corner, the Greenwich family might have been found assembled, early one winter's evening. Near the centre of the room was a table, at which sat the squire, with spectacles on his nose, a worn and venerable volume open before him, and his snuff-box at his left hand. Behind him, in an obscure position, sat the meek Mrs. Greenwich, knitting. At the end of the table was Etty, the genius, engaged upon a poetical composition, her large, high forehead shining like marble, as she leaned over her paper in the light. Last, not least, was Robert, in the corner opposite the clock, with his head on his breast, his arms folded, and his legs stretched out towards the stove.

"How many vases have you composed, my child?" whispered Mrs. Greenwich, behind her husband's back.

"Five," replied Etty, with a perplexed look. "I'm trying to find a rhyme to crystal; then I shall have six."

"Pistol," suggested Mrs. Greenwich.

"Mrs. Greenwich!" said the squire, in a grave tone, "are you aware that I am reading?"

"O!" exclaimed the lady, obsequiously.

Silence again. The old gentleman reading; Etty puzzling her unhappy brain over her composition; Robert chewing the cud of meditation in the corner. Presently Mrs. Greenwich moved her chair carefully back, with a smile of maternal encouragement brightening in her face.

"Can you make pistol do?"

"Mrs. Greenwich!" said the squire's precise accents, "how many times must I request not to be disturbed when that I am reading?" He pushed his book across the table, shoved back his chair, raised his spectacles above his eyebrows, and rapped the lid of his snuff-box. Mrs. Greenwich trembled; Etty sighed; Robert crossed his legs and scowled. A family lecture was expected. Whilst the old gentleman was clearing his throat, and pursing up his mouth into a patriarchal grimace, his wife hazarded an explanation.

"Etty could n't find a rhyme to crystal, and I thought it would do no harm to help her a little. Poor child! she does n't receive any too much encouragement —"

Mr. Greenwich raised his hand. That hand meant silence; and silence ensued.

"Daughter?"

"What!"

"Daughter?"

Etty, more lady-like: "What, sir?"

"Why did you not respond, when that I addressed you before?"

"I did, sir."

"What did you say, daughter?"

Etty, hesitating: "I said — what."

"Was that a response, daughter?"

"No, sir."

"That is all. Remember. Now, what is the rhyme?"

"A rhyme to crystal."

"I thought pistol was good," Mrs. Greenwich ventured to interpose.

"There's a rhyme for you, Etty, ready cocked and primed," said Robert, with gloomy humor, from the corner.

"Mrs. Greenwich! Robert! I am speaking. Respect the paternal head! Daughter?"

"What, father?"

"Name the subject of your composition."

"The Fair Nun's Complaint," said Etty, readily.

"It is absurd," returned the paternal head, with a look at Mrs. Greenwich, which expressed his opinion of her capacity, "to suggest a rhyme, without regard to the subject of the composition. What has the 'Fair Nun's Complaint' to do with pistols?"

Mrs. Greenwich, simpering: "I thought Etty could work it in, she's so ingenious!"

Mr. Greenwich, with a significant nod: "That will do, Mrs. Greenwich! Now to the poem."—The genius read a stanza.—"Very creditable, my daughter. Subject, Fair Nun's Complaint; quatrains; octosyllabic measure, with redundant syllable at the end of first and third lines; rhyme required to crystal. Now for our rules. What is the body of the word?"

That was found to be *ystal*; and the application of rules consisted in finding among consonant sounds another head to match the decapitated word. Father and daughter went through with the alphabet together, but without success. Heads were plenty enough, but, as Robert moodily suggested from his corner, the difficulty was to find one that had sense in it. An endless variety of such combinations as *bystal*, *cystal*, *dystal*, down to *zystal*, were manufactured, not one of which existed in any known dictionary. There was a solitary exception. It was the word *pystal*, or *pistol*.

"Pistol," said Mr. Greenwich, "appears, then, to be our only perfect rhyme."

"What did I tell you, Etty?" spoke up the mother, with a gleam of triumph.

"Mrs. Greenwich," observed the paternal head, with stern precision, "your assistance is not required."

"O!"—and Mrs. Greenwich settled down again, with an annihilated expression.

"What do we do in the case, daughter?" said the squire.

Etty replied that where no perfect rhymes would answer, imperfect ones might be used.

"Then," said Robert, "what do you say to whistle? If your nun, with the tears of crystal, only knew how to whistle, you would be provided for; you could bring it in finely. Or gristle, or sizzle, —you have plenty of such rhymes. How would drizzle do?"

"Son Robert, you amaze me!" uttered the paternal head, with a look of solemn displeasure. Then turning to Etty: "Daughter, I have the required rhyme. It is a felicitous word, inasmuch as that it is in perfect keeping with your subject. It is vestal. A nun may be called a vestal. I trust to your happy talent to make fitting use of it in the structure of the lines."

But Robert's ridicule was too much for the sensitive child; and the discovery of a fine rhyme was no consolation for his sarcasm. She was crying.

"Hem!" coughed the paternal head, moving in his chair. He drew up his book, and shoved it from him again; wiped his spectacles, and saddled them once more on his eyebrows; then took another pinch of snuff. "You may put aside your vases for the present, daughter. Mrs. Greenwich, will you oblige me by dispensing with your knitting-work, and bestowing attention upon my remarks? Son Robert, a more respectful attitude will be quite as becoming in listening to what your father has to say. When that all appear prepared to hear, I will proceed."

Robert changed his position by crossing his legs in a contrary direction, and clasping his hands over his head, instead of behind his chair. A deep silence followed, broken only by the purring of the cat, as she rubbed her neck affectionately against the old lady's dress, and by the slow ticking of the old clock in the corner.

Mr. Greenwich, impressively: "We are waiting for Robert."

"O, waiting for me? What can I do for you, sir?"

"If you do not perceive, we will wait until that you do."

Whether Robert knew from experience that his father would keep his word, and wait all night, if necessary, in the same fearful silence, or whether he reflected that it was injudicious to provoke the paternal displeasure too openly, he yielded the point, and assumed a more decorous attitude.

"Son Robert," then said the old gentleman, placing the book on his knees, and laying his spectacles upon it, "your conduct has failed of pleasing me of late, and I have treasured a few words for your edification. A fit occasion to deliver them hath arrived." Then followed a tedious discourse, of half an hour's duration, on

the subject of family discipline, reverence to the paternal head, and kindred topics, with a particular application to Robert's case. "But this is not all. The report is, son Robert, that you indulge in dram-drinking; and you have carried your disregard for my wishes so far as to smoke cigars even in my own house." Thereupon the paternal head took a violent pinch of snuff. "You may reply, that you are of an age to regulate your own conduct in this respect. I will forestall the remark, by saying that no child of mine is of an age to transgress my commands beneath my own roof. Your other irregularities have not escaped public censure, and I have more than once taken occasion to remind you of your derelictions. Your instability of character has become notorious. When that you returned from Mobile, where you had an excellent, lucrative situation, you gave as an excuse, that you had taken a summer vacation, to avoid the extreme heat of the climate. But, the summer over, you must be posting off to the north, in search of new employment. Now, there is another change; and you have some mysterious business on your hands, which you will communicate to nobody. You go and come, as the whim takes you; appearing to make my house a sort of den to hide in, and acting more like a culprit than a son of respectable 'Squire Greenwich. Your disposition, moreover, exhibits the effect of idle habits, inasmuch as that you are morose and sullen, and that your principal pleasure appears to consist in ridiculing your sister's noble aims. I need not again remind you that all this is to be reformed. You will now please withdraw, and ponder what has been said. Daughter, I have a few remarks for you."

Without a word, Robert rose, and went to his chamber. Half an hour later, his door was pushed open, and Etty looked timidly in. He sat before his desk; leaning his face upon his clenched hands, with an unfinished letter lying before him in the lamp-light. The child's eyes were red with weeping, but she had dried her tears, which her brother so much hated, and she was trying very hard to look cheerful, as she approached the desk.

"What do you want?" What she wanted was but a simple and easy thing to grant. The poor child could not sleep that night without telling him how sorry she was to have displeased

him, and to ask his forgiveness. But his tone and manner frightened her. "Come here," said he, as she stood shrinking before him. "Did you want to see what I was writing? Read it!"

He extended the manuscript, and, as she bent forward, confused and trembling, to obey, struck her with it upon the cheek.

"Is it interesting?" said he, with a malicious laugh.

"O, Robert! I did not mean —"

"That will do, my dear. Thank you for your interest in my affairs. In return, I'll give you another rhyme for your crystal. It is *mizzle*. In familiar colloquy, it signifies vamoze; cut stick; make yourself scarce; evaporate; in short, go away. Do you understand?"

With a bursting heart, holding her hand to her face, Etty hastened to relieve him of her hated presence, and, retreating to her room, threw herself upon her pillow in convulsions of girlish grief.

XXX.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

HECTOR's preparations were made. Then came the parting O, Charlotte ! be brave ! be strong ! What is life, what is death, what are the pangs and fears of a day, if thou hast faith in the immortality of love ?

Charlotte was brave and strong ; she looked beyond all the clouds that hung over her path, into the light of a clear, deep heaven, to which Hector pointed her, and which love and truth made theirs, whatever might be their fortunes for a time. She gave him only words and looks of encouragement at their parting, and waved her handkerchief to him from her window, until he was shut from her view. Then what tears she shed in the secrecy of her chamber, no one knew. When she entered Mrs. Dunbury's room, it was she who had strength and cheer to impart to the desponding mother.

Mr. Dunbury, still suffering from his hurts, grew more moody than before. In the unoccupied hours of his indisposition, his morbid mind dwelt upon the past. He remembered the golden prospects of his youth, his proud family connections, the elegance and ease that graced his early life. From that bright beginning, his star had waned and sunk, until now he could look upon himself only as a coarse and vulgar old man. He was conscious that all the finer feelings of his youth were deadened. Life had become a desert, with not one oasis in the dreary waste of common toils and trials, on which to feed a hope. And it was his own wretched folly which alone he had to accuse. Conviviality, extravagance, wild dissipation, ruin ; such was his history. Two pictures, in tragical contrast, hung forever before his eyes,— what

ne might have been — what he was ! Thus, memory became remorse, and gnawed his heart. Or if at any time his better angel whispered that by a true life he might still atone for his errors, his thousand resolutions in the past, made only to be broken, arose like ghosts before him, grinning and mocking.

All this Charlotte perceived. She knew, too, that he regarded her with jealous eyes. He was proud still ; he remembered that Hector was the son of a gentleman, and that Charlotte was a servant. He had observed their intimacy ; and now Hector was abroad on her business. “The next thing will be a marriage !” He expressed his thoughts to his wife ; he did not conceal them from Charlotte. Still, she had no condemnation for him, but much compassion. She sought his good-will ; she exerted herself to please him ; and often there was a charm about her which not even he could resist.

One day, having dressed his wound as usual, she asked permission to comb his hair. He answered that he could never endure any person to touch it ; but her tone, her smile, and the winning assurance with which she brought the brush and comb, quite disarmed his ill-nature. Never was experiment more successful. There was certainly a magnetism in her touch ; for, so far from being irritated, he felt only a soothing influence. The invalid looked on in mild delight, to see Charlotte do, with such perfect ease and grace, what had never before been accomplished. Unfortunately, Corny’s ever-recurring head was put in at the door.

“’S a man out here. Do’no’ what he wants ; guess he’d like to hire out. Said he’d saw for me, if I’d come in an’ tell ye.”

“Tell me what ?”

“Do’no’ ; did n’t say,” drawled Corny.

The boy was sent about his business, with an injunction to enter the house with no more such meaningless errands. But in five minutes the indefatigable head reappeared.

“Tol’ me to come in an’ tell ye !”

“To tell us what ?”

“Did n’t say ; I can’t git nothin’ out on him. Guess it’s Charlotte he wants ; for he said ’t wan’t you nor Mis’ Dunbury,

nor Bridget, nuther; an' when I axed if 't was Charlotte, his eyes looked — I can't tell how, but real funny, an' he called me Telescope. That 's all; an' he made me come in an' tell ye."

Mr. Dunbury answered with a look, which Corny understood, and he withdrew muttering. Charlotte continued her task. But the charm was broken. Her hand had grown nervous, and Mr. Dunbury's equanimity was destroyed. Another reëpppearance of Corny. Charlotte looked pale. Mr. Dunbury looked very red.

"I do'no' what to do. I can't git red on him. He keeps makin' me come an' tell ye. I never see sich a man. He can't saw wood more 'n a hen; and he 's mos' broke the saw a'ready."

With a fiery expression Mr. Dunbury arose.

"Let me go!" cried Charlotte. In the wood-shed she found the incomprehensible visitor. He was making violent efforts to extricate the saw, which had become pinched in the stick he was cutting, notwithstanding the handfuls of snow he had put in to facilitate the movement.

"Edward!"

He looked up, took off his hat, and, drawing up his meagre figure with great dignity, made a profound obeisance.

"Salutation, your majesty! I abdicate the saw-horse! I hope my appearance is not premature. I am unused to state occasions."

"You 've e'en-a-jest broke the saw!" muttered Corny.

"Verification!" whispered Edward, with a keen glance. "If dissatisfied, you can appeal. But say no more, and here 's a butternut for you."

"I do' want none o' yer butt'nuts! I s'pose I shall be blamed for these 'ere teeth bein' broke; that 's all I care fur."

"Broken teeth — so shall truth be delivered! Acts have their meaning. I surprise your majesty?"

"I little suspected to see you again so soon," said Charlotte. "Where are you from to-day?"

"From Siberia, the land of exile!" answered the prime minister. "To bring your majesty an offering. Will you receive it now?"

"What is it, Edward?"

"A head, your majesty; that of a subject who had the misfortune to offend you!" and Edward's eyes gleamed.

"What do you mean?" cried Charlotte.

"Will you have it in a sack, or on a charger? It awaits your bidding!"

"Where, Edward?"

"On these shoulders, your majesty!" and the prime minister bowed gravely. "If convenient, I'd have pickled it, and brought it you in a jar. But it can be presently taken off, at your command. Behold the executioner with his axe!" indicating Corny with his wood-saw.

"Edward," said Charlotte, "these things are unworthy of you. Come in, and tell us of your journey."

"Though worn, and shorn, and tattered, and torn, he was onward borne! There were wolves and bald-eagles, but the Seven Wise Men carried him through. Over the snow, now high, now low, now fast, now slow, on, on we go! whoo-ip! whoo-oo! That's the ginger!"

"Edward, do you hear me? You are among relatives now, who will not appreciate your flights of intellect. You must be like other people, if you would please me."

"What! since that morning? You thought to deceive; but, glory to the sacred titmouse! it was all whispered in my ear. You rode off grandly with Prince Hector; but I was at the church before you. I covered myself with a blanket, and hid behind the organ."

"Dear Edward," pleaded Charlotte, "if you have any regard for me, forget all that; speak of it to no one here! Consider me as I was before!"

"Prince Hector looked royal; but the hypocrite in the robes turned pale as his shirt. I groaned three times for the echo. Wo! wo! wo!—how it sounded in the roof! I laughed like a handsome young widow at the funeral of a rich old husband! 'T was solemn fun!"

"Edward, you do not please me, and I shall leave you. In that room you will find your relatives."

"Siberia!" exclaimed the prime minister. "If my wits wan-

der, it's owing to the frost: u-g-h-h! how I shivered! I lamented the marriage; but I did not envy the prince. So — or call in the executioner. Ho! what functionary?"

The sitting-room door was opened, and Mr. Dunbury appeared.

"Edward Longman! how came you here?"

"What shall I say?" asked the prime minister, aside. "Can I mention the Seven Wise Men?"

"No, Edward. Tell him you walked, if you did walk."

"I walked, if I did walk, your honor!" — and, bowing profoundly, Edward looked to Charlotte for her approbation.

A shadowy scowl passed over the wintry landscape of Mr. Dunbury's face, as he made a motion for the wanderer to go in.

"Welcome is the honey of souls," remarked Edward, "but dark looks are gall. Thank your honor. In our kingdom there shall be schools of the virtues, and hospitality shall be taught before ciphering. I engage you as a professor. There's a smiling face," scrutinizing Mrs. Dunbury, who held out her hand to him from her easy-chair; "but we are not what we seem. Experience is the mother of caution."

"Have you forgotten me, cousin?"

"I should do ill to forget so venerable a lady! And here's a shake for you!"

Mrs. Dunbury invited him to be seated, and inquired about his family.

"They are well, for a family of sinners. The old lady has experienced a miraculous cure."

"Your mother?"

"Whom they called my mother. Disease has vanished, and she enjoys rest; bless her dear old soul!"

"How do you mean?"

"O, death is your only doctor! She put off mortality nine days ago. Let fools weep at funerals; the wise will take holiday. It's a weary world; and all who live sin, and all who sin suffer. I could name an exception; for one soul is exempt. Or if ever he suffers," — the prime minister laid his hand upon his breast, bowing graciously, — "it is from spare diet, thin clothes, and the sins of others! But he bears up, thanks to a sound mind in a sound

body, and to the Seven Wise Men. I've eaten nothing since yesterday, and I've tramped through snow and through water."

He glanced downwards to his boots, which were thin, red, and saturated; and the expression of his face was wild, and weary, and haggard. Mrs. Dunbury questioned him concerning his mother; but he shook his head thoughtfully, still gazing at his feet.

"Give him some dry socks," muttered Mr. Dunbury, "and let Bridget set out a luncheon. I'd rather have seen the cholera enter the house; but while he remains he must be feared for."

"Thank you, professor!" Edward looked up, with a bright expression. "When I go, the cholera shall come. The cramps are jolly! Then you'll think of me!"

And he laughed a light, airy, hollow laugh, which chilled the blood to hear. His eyes followed Charlotte, as she passed from the room; then, moving over to Mrs. Dunbury, he put his hand to his mouth, and whispered, mysteriously,

"She's a queenly figure! But where's the bridegroom? I am to omit all titles, or I would call him Prince Hector. 'T was an illustrious marriage, but there was an attempt at secrecy."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Mr. Dunbury.

"State policy! I suspected his second visit; and they could not deceive me! She had been two weeks preparing. They knew my opinions of marriage, and feared my opposition. But I was at the church before them. Ha! you look troubled!"

"Dismiss Charlotte from your mind, and dry your feet by the fire," said Mrs. Dunbury.

"Evasion! You are the queen-mother; and you fear treason. I have no griefs; but I liked not that the ceremony should be mean and obscure. I would have had it grand and imposing. The guests are met, the feast is set, mayst hear the merry din! So I cried wo! three times, and heard it echo in the roof. You are the bridegroom's father."

Mr. Dunbury turned upon his wife. Her looks betrayed her. The shadow on his face became that of a thunder-cloud.

"This means something! And you are not ignorant! What is it? What of Hector and Charlotte?"

Edward laughed. "Excellent artifice! But no deception. They had two witnesses at the church; and I made a third. I was the guest that had not on a wedding garment."

His wild words were cut short by the appearance of Charlotte.

"What is this, I say?" roared Mr. Dunbury. "Have I been duped? Has my son married my servant?"

Charlotte reeled and clung to the door for support.

"Mr. Dunbury! — husband! — father! — in the name of mercy," pleaded the invalid, "be gentle with the child! If fault there be, it is not hers, — it is Hector's — mine! Do not kill her!"

The prayer was unheeded. The purple rage in Mr. Dunbury's face, and the bursting fury of his speech, struck Charlotte down, as at a blow. With a faint cry of anguish, she loosed her hold, and fell to the floor. The invalid, tottering forward, essayed to raise her in her arms. Edward set up a shout.

"Ha! ha! ha! The world is topsy-turvy! They would cheat me of my wit; but artifice, avaunt! 'T was I that hid in the church, and groaned behind the organ!"

XXXI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

THE "Fair Nun's Complaint" remained a poetical fragment. The young authoress felt no more inspiration for the subject, from the memorable evening of the rhymes; and after several unsuccessful attempts to complete the sixth stanza, she tore the manuscript.

"Why!" exclaimed Mrs. Greenwich, "what makes you do so? How sorry I am! They were very pretty verses, I am sure."

"I never wrote anything so dull in my life!" exclaimed Etty.

"O, now! You need n't think so! You should have patience. Can't you remember the verses, and write them off?"

"If I could, I would n't!"

"Why, my child, I am surprised! How can you be so unladylike? What would your father say? Here, give me that other piece; these go together, don't they? What word is that torn off? I can make out all of one verse but that; and it's very touching, seems to me. I don't know when I've seen such good poetry anywhere. 'The moonbeams 'neath the convent dashing, my tears are glittering on the roof,' — those are very beautiful words!"

"It is n't so!" cried Etty, attempting to snatch the paper.

"O!" said her mother, "I have n't matched the pieces right. It's the moonbeams that glitter, and the waves that dash; but I am sure it reads well either way. Now, do you sit down and finish it for the *Green Mountain Herald*; everybody will admire it in print, and then your father will praise you."

But Etty only took the fragments to put them into the fire. Etty was human, although a genius. Perhaps she was all the

more human on that account. From her infancy her heart had felt a hungering for love; and her hopes and affections had centred in her brother, unworthy as he was. His indifference gave her pain, without lessening her attachment; and when he was unkind to her, she was more ready to accuse herself than him. But the most cruel test to which her love had ever been put was the blow with which he sent her from him that night. When the bitter memory swelled in her heart, it seemed almost bursting with anguish. Unfortunately, she was kept from school, to be under her father's immediate instruction; and she had no companions. Indeed, there was but one person whose sympathy she much desired. That person was Charlotte Woods, whose kindness she so gratefully remembered. But she did not know that Robert ever went to Mr. Dunbury's now; and if he did, there was no hope that he would take her with him. So her only consolation was to brood silently over her grief by day, and by night to sigh and weep upon her wretched pillow.

In this state of mind, Etty naturally preferred solitude to the company of the family. But it was winter, and her mother would not suffer her to sit in the cold rooms. Generally, however, there was a fire in Robert's chamber; and, when he was absent, she used to get permission to sit up there alone, pretending to take advantage of the quiet, to study her lessons. She was careful that Robert should not find her there; listening for his footsteps, and gliding softly away at his approach. One evening, however, having ensconced herself in a favorite position by the window, where she could gaze at the moon, and drawn the curtains about her in a manner completely to exclude the light of the lamp, she gave such free rein to her fancy, that, wandering far off into the regions of ideal hopes and sorrows, it somehow lost itself, and passed, unconsciously, into the realm of dreams. Nature had long been cheated of her proper repose by the young girl's melancholy; and now she took ample revenge. Etty's head had sunk upon her arm, and her sleep was profound. She dreamed that Robert and Charlotte were married, and that she went to live with them, and was very happy; the only trouble being that their house was discovered to be a convent, and that her new

sister turned out to be a nun, who was in great distress because she was to be printed, for general circulation, in the *Green Mountain Herald*. It was Robert who had condemned her to that punishment, for wearing his white satin waistcoat to a sewing-circle in the village; an offence nuns had a passion for committing, notwithstanding the fatal consequences. Etty went to him to plead Charlotte's cause; when he struck her so violent a blow with the warrant he was signing, that — she awoke.

She started in terror; for the place seemed strange to her, and she heard voices in the room. Then came the shock of consciousness: she remembered where she was: she had been asleep, and Robert had returned! He was not alone; he had one or two companions; Etty could not tell at first how many. The lamp found burning on his table did not surprise him; for often, when he was out, Etty had left a light for him, on going to bed. But it was now late, the oil was low, and the dim flame cast but a feeble ray in the chamber. Added to this, was the fact that the window where the child sat was partly concealed by the bed. In her first tremor of affright, Etty had not the courage to discover herself: she waited to still the fluttering of her heart, and to gather breath and strength; and the longer she waited the more terrible her situation became. She heard words which she knew she ought not to hear. Robert had introduced his companion into his chamber, at that secret hour, that even the circumstance of their conferring together might be hidden from all the world. And there sat the young girl, an unwilling listener to all that was said! A glimpse she had of some great danger that hung over one she loved added intensity to her fears. What the danger was, she could not fully comprehend; but it appeared none the less awful for the mystery in which it was veiled. Then the child remembered the dream from which she awaked but now, so seemingly absurd, yet so seemingly prophetic; and felt cold shudders of dread creep over her, as she thought of — Charlotte!

How long the interview lasted, Etty had no means of judging. It would have been difficult for her to believe that so much suffering as she experienced could be compressed within the brief space of an hour. It seemed prolonged through the whole of a long

winter's night. At last Robert conducted his companion from the room; she heard them go softly down stairs, heard a door open and close, heard her father cry out from his bed-chamber "Who is there?" and heard Robert answer, "I am after a glass of water." But by this time the child stood trembling in her own chamber: she had arrived there without knowing how: she had never any recollection of passing from room to room. She waited until she saw the shimmer of Robert's lamp on the landing, and heard his door close after him; then shrank away in her dreary room to her bed, and covered her head, shivering with terror and cold.

Etty thought it must now be near morning. But she had long hours yet to wait. How often she looked from beneath the clothes, to see the glimmer of gray light on the walls! — At last, at last, it came: the slow, reluctant dawn peeped in at the window. Her room was on the opposite side of the house from her brother's, looking towards the north; and, as soon as it was light enough to see, she got up and gazed anxiously down the valley. It was a mild winter's morning; the eaves dripped with the melting snow. Yet the earth was white, and the road leading towards Mr. Dunbury's house looked desolate and forbidding. How was she to traverse it, to get to Charlotte? She dared not tell her mother where she wished to go, lest Robert should learn of it, and guess her purpose; and the only way seemed to be, to plan an escape from the house, and then, on foot and alone, to travel that lonely track to save her friend.

A plan was easily invented. Her newly-married cousins, the Crestons, lived a little out of the village, although in an opposite direction from that she wished to go. For some time she had been planning to make them a visit, and she would ask permission of the mother to go that day.

The permission was asked, and granted. But her father's sanction was necessary to render it valid. His decision was, that, provided she would have her lessons to recite when he came home to dinner, she might go to her cousin's in the afternoon. Etty was in despair; for the afternoon would be too late; and her father's decisions were unalterable. Fortunately, her pale looks, discolored

eyes, and want of appetite, attracted his attention at the breakfast-table.

"Daughter, are you in your usual health this morning?"

"Yes, father." Etty's voice faltered, and her eyes fell; for Robert had appeared, and it seemed to her that he could read her burning secret.

"How late did you study, last night?"

"Not — very late."

"You should n't study a minute after eight o'clock, my child," said the mother. "You have n't been well, these three weeks; and I believe it's nothing in the world but —"

"Mrs. Greenwich," interrupted the paternal head, "I was speaking!"

Mrs. G., with alacrity: "I hear you, Mr. Greenwich."

The paternal head nodded approvingly, and turned to Etty. "Daughter, when that you requested permission to visit your cousins, it would have been your desire to go this forenoon; but, upon hearing the paternal decision, you maintained a respectful silence, as was befitting. Your dutiful behavior merits indulgence; and, in consideration of your application to your books, I have weighed the matter, and resolved to reward you with a day's recreation."

Etty, tremulously: "Thank you, father."

"If Robert has nothing to do —" began the mother.

"Mrs. Greenwich," said the paternal head, with severe deliberation, "if it is your design to usurp the conversation, I will hold my peace."

"O, by no means! Go on, Mr. Greenwich! I was only going to make the remark — never mind!"

"Son Robert," then said the 'Squire, "you will oblige me by carrying your sister over to your cousins' in the cutter."

"If my sister will accept my escort," replied Robert, bowing deferentially, "nothing will afford me greater pleasure."

Etty dared not raise her eyes. "I can walk, as well —"

"Daughter, since the paternal head has decided, is it fitting that you should make remarks?"

Poor Etty could not say one word. Nothing was left her, but

to await Robert's motions, and trust to some kind chance, for which she tremblingly prayed, to favor her escape to Charlotte. It was an hour before he was ready to accompany her. The snow was thawing fast; in many places the road was broken by hoofs; and he drove very slowly. Arrived in sight of their cousins', she besought him to go no further, but to set her down, and leave her to walk the remaining distance.

"Bless your dear heart!" he said, sarcastically, "how extremely anxious you are to get rid of me, this morning!"

"I make you so much trouble —"

"Trouble? On the contrary, in the fond hope of giving you pleasure," — with a vein of mockery in his tones, — "I had concluded to make a visit with you, and have a game of chess with Charley's wife, after dinner."

Etty hoped he did but jest; but when he ordered his horse to the stable, and, entering the house with her, declared gayly that he had come over to read Tom Moore, and to beat his fair cousin at a game of chess, the child's heart sank, and she almost cried out with despair, as she thought of Charlotte.

XXXII.

FLIGHT.

RECOVERING from her swoon, Charlotte put her friend gently from her, and, holding her hand upon her heart with an expression of unutterable suffering, withdrew quietly to her chamber.

"The gentleman's victuals is ready," said Bridget at the door.

"Truth is eternal; but cooking is a necessary evil;" and Edward arose with alacrity. "When the state of innocence is reached, men will winter upon acorns and dried snails. Meanwhile greatness must crunch! Lead the way, Elephant's-foot!—If I fast too long, the hungry tiger haunts me; but after the lunch, Solon will shine out."

The invalid lay, pallid, and sighing at long intervals, upon the lounge.

"You, then," burst forth her husband, "you have encouraged the imposition, you have helped to make me a dupe, you have countenanced your son's folly!"

"O, sir," cried the invalid, rising slowly upon her arm, and answering his furious look with a sad and earnest glance, "it was in fear of a worse folly, of which you are not ignorant, that I consented to the marriage. Look at Edward!—then think of Hector, who inherits the same blood, the same dangerous temperament, from our ancestors! O, what is family pride, compared with the welfare of a heart and mind like his?—And think of Charlotte! consider how tender, and lovable, and true, she is; and that Hector's feelings, with all their depth and intensity, have centred in her; then, for his sake, if not for her sake, be merciful!"

"What does talk amount to? Go on till dooms-day; make Hector a saint, make Charlotte an angel, make me a brute! then

show one tangible excuse,—the shadow of reason,—why I should have been duped ! ”

“ O, would I could explain ! But when Hector went to bring Charlotte back, and when we both longed to tell you their history up to that hour, he could not approach you — I could not ! ”

“ Was I so terrible a monster ? ”

“ You force me to say what I would leave unsaid ! When you are yourself, you are to me a husband,—to him, a father. But there are times when you are not yourself, as you know ! ”

The quiet tone in which the invalid uttered the notorious truth of her husband’s inebriety for a moment staggered him, and left him quivering with inarticulate rage.

“ No one wished to deceive you ; but, considering your state, we deemed it advisable to wait until Charlotte’s affairs were settled.—But of this I cannot speak ; you would not hear me, you would not understand ; and I must leave the rest to Hector, on his return. Would he were here to-day ! ”

“ So say I ! ” and the inebriate stamped the floor with his infuriate heel.

“ You forget,” said Mrs. Dunbury, “ that he is of an age to act for himself.”

“ And let him ! Had he chosen a negress or a squaw, he might have married in spite of me. But when he thinks to harbor his baggage under my roof,—he shall see ! ”

“ He will be quite ready, sir, to remove his wife to another and pleasanter home, let me assure you ; and, no doubt, Charlotte will be as ready to go. Why did they come back here at all ? Was it not for my sake, and for your sake ? because you needed him, and I needed both ? Had they acted only for themselves, your house would never have been insulted by their presence, as you complain ! Young, strong, courageous, they can spare us very well ; it remains to be seen how well we can spare them.”

“ It’s Miss Charlotte I’d be findin’,” said Bridget at the door. “ There’s a visitor for her,” — scratching her elbow, and glancing about the room. Having seized the opportunity to look in upon an interesting family scene, she was in no hurry to retire. Mr. Dunbury breathed hard.

"A visitor?" said the invalid.

Bridget scratched the other elbow, grinning with conscious impertinence. "Yes 'm — it's the little janus — what ye cahl her — Mr. Robert's sister."

"Etty! who is with her?"

"It's nobody at ahl wid her, but her own silf jist! It's alone an' a cryin' she is; an' her fate 's as soppin' wet as iver they can be, wid the thahin' snow. I've got her by the stove, an' the quair gintleman's tellin' her the crackin'est stories! But she's ahl in the fidgets to see Miss Charlotte; an' she'll not be thinkin' of her soakin' fate, nor nothin' at ahl, a bit!"

Etty's large forehead and pale face emerged from the eclipse of Bridget's shoulder. Mrs. Dunbury called her, and she came eagerly into the room. "I want to see Miss Woods! Is she in her chamber? Can I go and find her?"

"Sit down, my dear child, and Bridget will speak to her for you. How wet your dress is!"

"Yes — and I must go right back!" Etty began to cry. "I would n't care, but I don't know what my mother will say! I was at my cousins' — I had something to tell Miss Woods — O, if you will let me go and find her! I know her room!"

The invalid gave her consent, and the child hastened to climb the chamber-stairs, and knock with her trembling hand at Charlotte's door. Then, having thrust Bridget from the room, Mr. Dunbury stood fuming before the invalid's lounge.

"I'll know the rest! Who are my son's connections? Who is this adventuress? Is she so much worse than a beggar, that you dare not speak? Is she some creature who has first brought shame upon her own family, then upon mine? Has Hector gone to appease the anger of an outraged parent, or the vengeance of a dishonored husband? Has the name of Dunbury come to this?"

"It is well for you, sir, to speak of the name of Dunbury! — you, who have done so much for it!"

The words pierced and stung. The proud Englishman writhed a moment, then burst forth with redoubled fury. In the very hurricane of his speech, the door was again opened. Charlotte entered. She was very pale, her lips were colorless, her eyes

looked wild and strange. She had on her bonnet and shawl, as if for a journey.

“Charlotte!” the invalid cried out.

“Will you let Cornelius carry me over Wild River in the sleigh?”

“My child! where are you going?”

“I could walk,” said Charlotte, — “but there is water around the bridge: beyond that, I shall need no assistance.”

The invalid saw Etty’s frightened face behind the door. Something like the truth flashed upon her. She glanced despairingly from Charlotte to her husband.

“Cornelius can go — can he not — to the river — ”

“To the river, — to the end of creation!”

Charlotte spoke a hasty word of thanks, which died in her throat, and hurried from the room. Mrs. Dunbury followed to the hall. A few incoherent and terrified words passed between them; and Charlotte, bursting from the other’s trembling embrace, went swiftly from the house. Bridget was calling Corny, but no Corny appeared.

“O, Bridget, I cannot wait! — I will walk!”

“He’s gahn ahf wid the quair gintleman,” scolded Bridget. “But I can be tacklin’ the hoss for ye, — if that’s ahl, — an’ dhrive ye ahf, into the bargain.”

“O!” said Charlotte, “if you will!”

“Let me help!” cried Etty.

“No, child! — stay with Mrs. Dunbury. And may God bless you, my dear, dear Etty!”

Bridget preceded Charlotte to the barn. This was a species of stable and wagon-house combined, with two doors on the side of the street, and with light and space within to harness a team.

“Wat n’ise was that?” asked Bridget, standing agape at the entrance of the smaller door.

“Bridget,” said Charlotte, with singular earnestness, “I believe you love me!”

“Ye may well say that same, Miss Charlotte! Ye’s the very fust Yankee woman iver I — ”

"Good, Bridget! I knew it was so! And now that I have only you to depend upon, you will—you will help me, I am sure!"

Bridget pledged herself with true Hibernian enthusiasm. "But what shall I be afther doin' for a beginnin'?"

"Get out the horse! Do not waste a minute!"

"Howly Mither! there's that n'ise again! It's somebody that's been murdered!" It was a muffled cry, that appeared to proceed from the direction of the granary.

"It is Cornelius," said Charlotte.

"The owl!" cried Bridget; "he's been lockin' himself up, wid the key on the outside!"

"Open for him! O, be quick!"

"But what if he should n't be Carny? What if he's only purtendin' to be there, an' it's a robber afther ahl? 'T would be jist one o' Carny's thricks!"

The cries increased. Corny began to kick and pound. There could be no doubt concerning his identity. Still, Bridget was cautious, and Charlotte unlocked the door. Corny came out, rubbing his eyes, and winking at the light.

"Ye're a pooty feller, to be alluz lockin' yerself up when ye're wanted!" exclaimed the indignant Bridget. "Coom an' be afther helpin' wid the harness."

"I did n't lock myself up! I went in arter some oats for ol' Maj., when that con—founder—" The speech was interrupted, Corny stumbling over a measure, and sprawling upon the floor. "I swan!"—gathering himself up, slowly,— "if there an't that 'ere half-bushel, 't I was lookin' fur, when that chap that broke the saw come an' shet the door on to me, an' locked me in! I'd like to find him once,— arter I git the oats!"

Charlotte entreated Corny to leave the oats, and assist in putting the horse before the cutter.

"Which hoss did Mist' Dunbury tell ye to take?"

"Ould Maj., av coorse," replied Bridget. "D'ye think I'd be drivin' the brute that rips up the wagons?"

"You! a good 'eal you'll drive! B'sides, Maj. had n't oughter go till he's had his oats."

The delay was torturing to Charlotte. The close air of the barn

stifled her; all things grew dark around her, and she groped her way to the door. Supporting herself by the beam, she breathed the open air, and felt the cold dashing of the eaves upon her neck. A sound of hoofs and runners startled her. She looked up. Three men in a sleigh were driving into the yard. They stopped; two of them jumped out, and entered the house by the front door; the third remained without.

One of those men Charlotte knew. The sight of him sent a chill through her veins. Cold drops started upon her brow, as she shrank back, trembling, into the obscurity of the barn. Just then there was a shout of laughter; and some person, who had lain concealed in the cutter, leaped up, shaking the buffalo-ropes with frantic glee. Bridget ran shrieking to the door.

"Edward — Bridget —" gasped Charlotte.

"Faix," cried Bridget, "I was spreadin' up the skin in the cutter, when out he jumps from under it, like the divil he is intirely!"

"O. be still!" said Charlotte, "or I am lost!"

"Ha! conspirators!" ejaculated Edward, bounding from the sleigh. "There shall be one capital crime: that of high treason. The punishment shall be strangling, and here are the clutches!" — showing his hooked fingers, as he sprang towards the door. "Let the tiger tickle them!"

Charlotte stopped him; she clung to him; she breathed out her fears; she implored him to hear her, to aid her. He struck his forehead with his hand.

"Stratagem! Your majesty shall be saved! After that, the execution. Leave all to the prime minister!"

"But — Edward — what will you do?"

His reply was clear and rapid. It showed a sharp, shrewd wit, which gleamed like a lightning-flash on Charlotte's bewildered brain. His plan was a wild one; but in it lay her only hope; and, adopting it desperately, she entreated Corny and Bridget to obey and assist him.

"Darned if I know the fust thing —" began Corny.

"Be valiant," cried Edward, "and it shall be revealed. Go to the gate, and the instant we pass, shut it after! — Lady Bridget, — this way!"

Etty glided into the barn. "They have come!" she uttered,—"the same man who was in the room last night—I knew his voice! O, make haste!"

The traces were hooked; Corny was at the gate; the large door was thrown open; then Edward, leaping into the sleigh by his companion's side, threw the buffalo-robe over her, and drove headlong out of the barn. Shaking the reins, and lashing the horse with the whip, he passed the sleigh in the yard, went through the gate, grazing the post with the runner, and plied, with furious speed, towards Wild River.

The man left in charge of the sleigh shouted the alarm, and sprang to his seat. Fortunately the span was headed the wrong way, and, before he could turn their faces towards the road, Corny had had time, in his moderate manner, to close the gate. The obstacle brought the sleigh to a sudden halt.

"Open, there!" cried the driver.

"Who said so?" muttered Corny.

"Open the gate!" thundered the man, shaking his whip.

"Tell me agin, then mabby I'll hear," said Corny, in an under tone, taking care to get beyond reach of the lash. The man jumped out, making a cut at Corny as he passed. The whistling of the whip started the horses; and, springing forward, they ran the neap against the gate. "So much for snappin' yer whip!" said Corny, with a grin. "You'll haye to back up now, or you can't git the gate open."

"Smash through it!" exclaimed a terrible voice, so near Corny's ear, that he jumped as if he had been struck. It was one of the men from the house. He leaped into the sleigh, and gathered up the reins. "Cl'ar the track, Jones! I'll go over that gate as if it was shingles!"

"Hold on, Dicks'n!" cried the other. "I'll be cheaper to open it!"

"Out o' the way!" shouted Dickson. "No time for fool'n'! Give us the whip—jump on!"

He struck the horses smartly. With a bound they brought the neap once more against the gate. The frame splintered, and they went over with a crash. The off-horse, however, unused to such

business, shied in passing, and forced the point of the runner against the post. Another dead halt; the men cursing, the horses trembling and cringing, Corny grinning at a safe distance. As it was out of the question to think of serving the gate-post as they had served the gate, the men found themselves obliged to follow Corny's original advice, and "back up." This was no easy matter, with the horses' legs entangled in the wreck. They kicked and flung, threatening to tear both harness and sleigh to pieces. But at last the fragments of the gate were either trodden down or thrown out of the way; the sleigh was cleared; and Dickson and his companion, jumping aboard, described a swift circle into the road, making the watery snow fly from the runners as they swept around, and dashed away in pursuit of the fugitives.

Old Maj. was no racer; but Edward exerted himself so well to develop his latent speed, that the cutter had already passed from sight over the hill. Arrived at the summit, Dickson and his companion beheld the fugitives splashing through the sluggish currents of water that crept around the bridge of Wild River; and a minute later old Maj. was seen making vigorous leaps up the steep road that led into the woods. By the time the pursuers had reached the bridge, Edward and his companion had once more disappeared.

Through the water and slush dashed the horses and sleigh. Dickson and his friend were bespattered from head to foot. Often the horses slumped through the hard-packed bed of the road, and threw up heavy clods, endangering their own limbs, and the eyes and features of the men. But Dickson held the reins and wielded the whip; Dickson cared neither for the horses, his friend, nor himself; his only thought was to overtake the fugitives, at every risk.

Old Maj. was no match for the strong, spirited span; and by the time the pursuers came again in sight, he was beginning to flag, notwithstanding Edward's efforts to keep up his courage with the whip. Escape by direct means became hopeless. As a last resort, the fugitives turned aside into a rough lumber-track, that wound through the woods. But a worse route could scarce have been chosen. Mounting a snow-covered acclivity, they reached an impassable chasm, filled with huge, heaped, massive rocks, around

the icy bed of Wild River. Seeing retreat thus cut off, Edward abandoned the track, and struck out among the trees on the bank. But the snow still lay heavy in those gloomy regions. The runners cut deep; it was no easy matter to avoid the roots and trunks, and little progress had been made, when the horses of the pursuers came bounding up the acclivity, and, wheeling among the trees, dashed alongside the cutter, just at a moment when it was arrested by the bristling tops of a fallen cedar. Dickson jumped into the snow, and scrambled to seize his prey.

"Destiny in a tree-top!" ejaculated Edward. "Let the vultures rage! I put my faith in the humming-bird. Come on!"

"We 'll come on fast enough!" cried Jones. "And jest you keep quiet, or you 'll git pitch-bowled down them 'ar rocks, like a cobble-stone! Make sure of *her*, Dicks'n!"

"Wal, I reck'n!" muttered Dickson, with gloating deliberation. "When I once get my eyes on a gal, it's as good as a bear-hug! Here ye be, my perty!"

"Hang on!" exclaimed Jones. "If she'd been spunky as some gals be, she'd made a desprit push over them 'ar rocks; it's what I was 'fraid of. I'm much obleeged to her, for my part."

"We 'll have a general thanksgiving!" said Dickson, with brutal satisfaction. "One live gal is worth a gang of dead ones. O, you're safe; don't squirm; 't an't no use! Show us yer face, my honey!"

— He pulled down the buffalo-robe, and pulled up the bonnet; then attempted to lift the head of his struggling captive.

"The Wise Men triumphant!" exclaimed Edward. "The dove was a jackdaw, and the cat pounced upon her own paws! Look to the feathers!"

"What's the row?" cried Jones, rushing to the spot.

Edward danced, and, flinging his hat into a tree, made the woods ring with his maniacal laugh.

Dickson dropped the bonnet; loosed his hold of the buffalo; stood, stared, — his face a picture of mingled stupefaction and fury, — as, struggling through a large quantity of tangled hair, giggling and gasping, appeared the round, red, ludicrous features of — BRIDGET!

XXXIII.

HOUSELESS.

"THE law, Mrs. Dunbury," said Oliver Dole, with the grimace of authority, "the LAW must be put in force. It is a painful duty we have to perform, — but, then, you know, the LAW!"

He was a gaunt, bony individual, with a hooked nose, and a massive nether jaw. He was the third person of Dickson's party, being an officer resident in the county, who had been selected to give character and dignity to the enterprise. A fitter choice could hardly have been made. The man was sunk in the officer; the waters of human feeling were in him congealed into the fixed, unswerving ice of public conscience. But Mrs. Dunbury was a mere woman. She fondly believed that the elements of love and mercy enthroned in the heart were a law above all laws. When Dickson and his companion rushed in pursuit of the cutter, she clung to Oliver Dole. With clasped hands, with sobs and tears, she pleaded for Charlotte.

"She is a being like one of us! She has all human attributes and feelings! She is a woman — a wife — my son's wife; my own beloved child! Do not subject her to the ignominy, the horror, the death, of such an ordeal. If money can satisfy the claims upon her, they shall be satisfied. Even now my son has gone to treat for her. Spare her, spare him, spare us, this terrible exposure! You are a man, a citizen; it is in your power to save her!"

"Mrs. Dunbury," responded Oliver Dole, with an official smack of his lips, "nothing is in my power that is not the law. I cannot be detained from my duty; and I charge you, Mrs. Dunbury, not to resist the law!"

Still she clung to him. She seemed endowed with a strength above her own. She would not loose her hold.

"Mr. Dunbury!" cried Oliver Dole, "I appeal to you!"

Mr. Dunbury stood by, a picture of apoplectic rage. His face was purple, his eyes blood-shot, the muscles of his mouth and throat moved convulsively. He heeded the officer no more than the eaves that dripped. The latter wrenched away the invalid's hands, and she fell upon the floor.

"Mr. Dunbury," then said Oliver Dole, "I anticipated nothing of this; and now I call upon you for support in the performance of my duty. If the girl escapes, this resistance may cost you dear. If you have a horse in your stable, I will take it, and follow on."

No word from Mr. Dunbury; but, with a look of strangulation, — clutching his breast as if to free his lungs, — he strode over his wife's prostrate form, and followed the officer from the room. At the entrance to the barn stood Etty, white and trembling. It was well the stanch Oliver did not observe the look she gave him, as he stepped into the stall of the remaining horse. A gleam of hope and joy broke through the pale anxiety of her features when she saw him untie the halter, and lead the animal out. To slip on a bridle, and leap upon the horse's back, was the work of a moment for Oliver Dole; and an instant after, riding over the broken gate, he joined in the noble chase. Etty clasped her hands, and ran to Mr. Dunbury.

"Here she is!" she uttered, hurriedly. "It was Bridget that went in the cutter! Be quick, and hide her somewhere!"

As she spoke, from beneath the manger crept a pitiful human figure, slender, bent, and trembling with excessive fear. It was Charlotte. She tottered forward, and fell down at Mr. Dunbury's feet. As she covered her face from his sight, one might have seen that her hand was wounded and bloody. Oliver Dole had crushed it with his iron heel, in leading the horse from the stall. It was doubtful if she had felt the pain at the time. Certainly she was insensible to it now; but Etty cried out with pity at the sight.

"O, Mr. Dunbury!" said the child, "what can she do? Don't let them take her away!"

No word yet from Mr. Dunbury ; none from Charlotte ; but shrinkingly she knelt there, as if it was his wrath alone she feared, and only his forgiveness she implored.

"O, Charlotte !" cried Etty, trying to lift her up ; "there is some place where they cannot find you ! Come ! O, sir, why do you let her be here ?"

Mr. Dunbury raised his remorseless arm. "Begone !" — his words flamed and hissed with fury, — "lose yourself, drown yourself, I care not, — but BEGONE !"

Charlotte arose and fled.

There was a cow-path trodden through the snow, leading across the meadows, over the bridge and along the banks of the stream. This path Charlotte took ; passing in her flight scenes which she had first visited in company with Hector, and which had become linked in her memory with warm and dear associations. But now how changed, how cold, how desolate, were they all ! The snow lay heavy and deep on the interval ; the willows were naked and dark ; the stream was blocked with ice. Beyond, frowned the inhospitable forest on the mountain side. The heavens above were leaden, with grayish streaks ; and now the slow, dull, wintry rain began to fall.

Beyond the bridge, the track threw out branches in several directions ; for here, all winter long, Mr. Dunbury's cattle and sheep had been foddered from the stacks in the valley. But the main path led along the banks of the creek ; this Charlotte chose, perhaps because among the willows her flight would be concealed, or it may be that she cherished some half-formed design of reaching Mr. Jackwood's house.

But the way was rude and difficult for her unaccustomed feet. Since the thaw, the track had been broken through by sharp hoofs ; water had settled in the low places ; and often, slipping upon the icy cakes, she fell, hurting her naked hands, bruising her limbs, and saturating her garments in the pools. Then, palpitating and breathless from the shock, she would pause, and glance up and down the wide, white valley, with fearful looks, as if expecting momentarily to see her pursuers appear.

A glimpse she caught of Mr. Jackwood's house in the distance

inspired her with courage to keep on. She saw the red-painted kitchen dimly defined upon the field of snow; the trees and fences speckling the ground; the heavy plume of smoke from the chimney, trailing low across the plain; and a vision of hope, and help, and rest, in that humble home, flitted before her mind. But the path by the willows had now dwindled to a scarcely-trodden track. At each step, her feet sank down in the soft, wet snow. Her efforts to proceed cost all her remaining strength. Only the desperate extremity in which she was sustained her. But hope and fear alike failed her at last; and, having climbed the tangled brush of a valley fence, she fell powerless in the snow, upon the other side.

The short winter's day was drawing to a close. The shades of the solemn hills shut in the plain. A dreary silence reigned, broken only by the lowing of cattle, and the faint, sad bleating of sheep in the distance, the sighing of the wind among the willows, and the melancholy drip of the rain. Having got a little rest, Charlotte summoned her energies for a fresh attempt to traverse the snowy track. But now formidable doubts stood in her way. She had faith in her old friends; but would Mr. Jackwood's house, which had twice received her in its hospitable retreat, be overlooked by her pursuers? Perhaps already they were there, before her; and to proceed might be to fall at once into their hands. In her deep perplexity, she crept under the fence, with a wild thought of passing the night in that wretched place. But the rain beat upon her still; her bruised hands ached from contact with the snow; and her feet were drenched and cold.

The approach of footsteps startled her; but she dared not look around, nor move; she lay still as death in her retreat. The sounds drew near, and presently a dog began to bark, plunging into the snow, close by where she lay.

"Come here, Rover!" cried an authoritative voice.

It was the voice of Abimelech Jackwood, the younger. The dog ran back, with excited yelps, and jumped upon his arm; then rushed to the attack again, bristling up, and barking furiously at the object by the fence. Charlotte spoke, "Rover!" Instantly he sprang towards her, with a joyous demonstration; hesitated at

half way, and ran back again to his master ; whisked about in the snow ; and finally, having fulfilled all the requirements of canine etiquette on the occasion, leaped upon her lap, wagging his tail violently, caressing her with his feet, and licking her wounded hand.

Abimelech stood at a discreet distance, and cried to Rover to come therè. Charlotte arose to her feet, and called his name.

"Hello !" cried Bim ; "that you ?"

She tottered forward. The boy, not so easily satisfied as the dog, showed a disposition to retire. But, in a few hurried words, she gave him to understand that she was no apparition, — that it was indeed Charlotte who spoke to him, — and that he was not to fear, but to aid her.

"Be ye goin' up to the house ?" asked the boy.

"Abimelech, some men are hunting for me ! I would rather die than have them find me ! And I don't know where to go !"

"Who be they ?" demanded Bim, with forced courage, looking around. "I'll set Rover on to 'em ! Here !"

"Where is your father ?"

"Up to the house, I guess," replied Bim.

"Will you go for him," said Charlotte ; "and tell him I am here, and tell no one else ?"

"Yes, I'll go !" cried Bim. "But," — hesitatingly, — "had n't you better go up to the stack, and wait there ? I'd ruther ye would ; I come down here to fodder the steers and lambs, and father told me not to go and look at my muskrat-trap, 'cause 't was goin' to rain. It's righ' down here ; an' if he knows where I found ye, he'll s'pect I was goin' there."

Charlotte accepted the boy's guidance ; and immediately around the bend in the creek, they came in sight of the stack. It was a low, gloomy mass, in the midst of a dark, trodden space, around the edges of which appeared Abimelech's steers and lambs, feeding on wisps of hay he had scattered over the snow. The stack was defended by a fence, on one side of which was a temporary shelter, formed of rails and boards, thatched with straw.

"If you'd like to hide," observed Bim, "I know a place, —

only I don't want father to find it out, for he tells me not to be makin' holes in the stack."

"Is it here?"

"I'll show ye!" and Bim, slipping a couple of rails from their place, crept through the fence, and began to pull away the hay from the stack. A dark cavity was exposed. "It's a den I made for me an' Rove! Once I had a notion o' runnin' away an' I was goin' to live here, and have him bring me my victuals! It's real slick an' warm in there!"

The opening was extremely narrow, and the cavity itself was small. But it was all Charlotte wished for then. She could not have entered a palace with more grateful emotions.

"Shall I leave ye a breathin'-place?" asked Abimelech, putting back the hay. "Hello! what's that Rover's barkin' at?"

He crept around the stack, leaving Charlotte listening breathlessly in her hiding-place. In a moment he returned, and whispered hoarsely in the hay, "There's a man a comin' with a big hoss-whip! Say! is he one of 'em?"

Charlotte knew not what she said, if indeed she uttered any reply. She heard the boy hastily smoothing the hay at the entrance of her cell; then all was still, only the dog barked; and as she strained her ear to listen, the straw beneath her rustled with every throb of her heart.

Having climbed the stack, and thrown down a quantity of hay before the mouth of the cavity, Bim began to arrange some boards in a manner to shed rain.

"Git out!" growled the man with the whip, making a cut at the dog.

"He won't bite ye," cried Bim. "Here, Rove!"

"Say, boy! have ye seen anybody pass this way, within half an hour or so?"

"Pass which way?"

"Any way — along by the crick."

"What crick?"

"Answer my question!"

"I han't ben here half an hour, I shouldn't think," said Bim.

"Look a' here!" thundered Dickson, "none o' yer trash with me! I cut a boy's trouse's-legs right off with this black snake, t' other day! He was a boy about your size, and his trouse's was stouter stuff than yours, too, I reck'n! Which way did that gal go?"

"What gal?" said Bim, stepping cautiously back upon the stack.

"Let me reach you with this lash, and I'll tickle your recollections! You'll look paler than that, when I draw about a quart of blood out of ye! I mean that gal that come along about twenty minutes ago."

"If there was any," — Bim looked very candid, but very pale, — "she must a' come along when I was off arter my traps; or else I should think I'd seen her."

"That won't do, boy!" Dickson cracked his whip savagely. "I'll give ye jest about a minute 'n' a ha'f to think about it; then, if ye don't walk straight up to the scratch, and spit out what ye know, you may expect to have your clo's cut right off 'm your back, and your hide with 'm!"

Then Charlotte heard a sound as of some one climbing the stack-yard fence, and a heavy body jumped down upon the ground at the very entrance to her retreat. There was a shaking in the hay which Bim had thrown before it; Dickson was kicking it open with his foot; he trod it down by the stack.

Bim looked anxious, but his wits did not desert him. "If ye'll help me with these 'ere boards, I'll go up to the house with ye, an' see if she's been by there."

"Where do you live?"

"In that house, up yender."

"What's yer name?"

"Bim!"

"What's yer whole name?"

"Bim'lech!"

"What's yer father's name?"

"His name's Bim'lech, too!"

"Bim'lech what?"

"Bim'lech Jackwood, of course!"

"Jackwood, hey? she used to live to your house, did n't she?"

"Yes, I guess not! *Who* used to?"

"We'll see!" said Dickson. Having, during the dialogue struck a match under his coat and lighted a cigar, he inserted the latter between his teeth, and, once more measuring out his whip, cracked it at the boy's ears. "Time's up! now, what ye got to say?"

"If you're goin' to smoke," said Bim, from a safe position, "you better git over the fence; you'll set the stack afire. Ow!" as the whip-lash whistled by his face, "you had n't better hit me with that! There's father, an' I'm darned glad!"

Dickson changed his tactics; perhaps because he found threats of no avail; perhaps because the boy had an adroit way of dodging over the stack beyond reach of his whip; or in consequence, it may be, of misgivings with regard to the parent Jackwood. He therefore opened a parley, and offered Bim half a dollar to tell him which way Charlotte went.

"I guess so!" said Bim. "You want me to come down an' git it, then you'll ketch me, an' gi' me a lickin' I know!" And he made preparations to slide off the opposite side, in case Dickson attempted to climb the stack.

But Dickson had a more important matter to attend to. Either the match he had thrown down after lighting his cigar, or cinders falling in the hay, had set fire to the heap. The flame, shooting up with a sudden crackling and glare, was the first warning he received of the danger. He had left the spot, and was standing by the cattle-shed, when the blaze caught his eye. He rushed to extinguish it, stamping, and trampling, and calling to the boy to bring snow.

"There an't no fire!" cried Bim, who thought it a ruse to bring him down.

"By ——!" said Dickson, "you'll find out whether there's a fire!"

Already Charlotte had smelt the burning straw. Then, through chinks in the opening of her cell, she caught fearful glimpses of the struggling flame and smoke. She heard the alarm, the oaths, the trample of feet. The stack was burning!

Her first impulse was to cry out, and rush from her retreat. But the certainty of falling into the hands of Dickson paralyzed her tongue, and chained her limbs. Death was nothing; a moment since, she would have risked a hundred deaths sooner than be taken; but to be burned, to perish in a slowly consuming mass, to die by torment in a tomb of fire! the thought was maddening; it filled her with an insensate fear, that caused her for the instant to forget all other danger. With frantic hands she tore the hay that blocked the opening. But a volume of smoke, pouring in upon her, changed her purpose. She thrust back the hay, while at the same time it was trampled and packed from without. She heard the simmer of snow upon the flames; she thought the fire was being extinguished. She hoped, she prayed, that she might yet be preserved.

But now the trampling feet, and snow packed down upon the burning hay, drove the smoke into the cell. Charlotte was suffocating. The torture almost forced her to cry out. O, that she might have power to endure yet a little while! She thought of Hector. For his sake she conquered her agony. Writhing in torment, she clasped her hands upon her face to stifle her own cries. Yet a little while! yet a little while! O, yet one moment more!

It could not be. She fought with death itself. It seemed that almost the last struggle, the last mortal throe, had come. Still Hector filled her soul. She might have endured and died; but, no! for him she would risk all things; for him she would suffer on; for him she would live! Again she tore the hay from the opening of the cell. But the act was forestalled. A hand, thrust in, met hers.

"Keep still!" whispered Bim, at the entrance. "Can ye breathe?"

She breathed, she lived, she hoped. The fire was extinguished. Dickson, enraged at the delay, had departed in haste, and the boy was left alone to trample out the smouldering sparks with snow.

"Hello, boy!" suddenly shouted Dickson, turning back, "fling me my whip!"

There was no service Bim would more gladly have performed. Anything rather than that Dickson should return to the stack. He looked for the whip, but could not find it. The man had thrown it down whilst extinguishing the fire, and thought it must have become trodden in the hay. He returned; they looked for it together, — Bim keeping at a respectful distance, and holding himself ready to run the instant the whip appeared, — Dickson growling and swearing. Suddenly, the end of the lash was discovered hanging off the cattle-shed, close by the stack. Dickson seized it; Abimelech fled; Charlotte, who had listened all the time with a fluttering heart, began to breathe again. But at the moment there was a movement at the mouth of the cell. The hay was opening; some object forced its way into her retreat. She was shrinking away in terror, when Rover, scrambling through, leaped into her face, and expressed his delight by barking playfully, licking her hands, and thumping the sides of the niche with his animated tail.

Fortunately Dickson had turned again to go, and was at that moment making long strides across the field. Bim returned to Charlotte just in time to bump noses with Rover, who, not liking the smoke, was leaping out of the hay.

“He’s gone!” whispered the boy. “Darn his old whip, I say! Did ye know he set the stack afire?”

“Did I know it!” murmured Charlotte.

“I’m all of a tremble yit!” said Bim. “I was a little bit scart; but, confound his pictur’! he did n’t find ye, after all, did he? That’s all I care for!”

“And it’s all I care for, now! I feel faint! Will you give me a handful of snow?”

The boy brought the snow: she pressed it on her forehead, as she lay panting upon the hay.

“Shall I go up an’ tell father, now?”

“If you will; but be careful, let no one else know —”

“I’ll keep it from Pheeb, anyway! She always tells everything. Say! shall I leave Rover for company?”

A faint “no” was the response; and the excited boy, having thrown the superfluous hay over the fence, and reárranged that at

the mouth of the cell, leaving only a breathing-place, as he called it, went off whistling, to appear unconcerned. She listened in her retreat; the sounds grew faint and fainter, ceasing at last; and she was left alone, in darkness and silence, hemmed in by the low roof and prickly walls of her cell.

For some minutes she lay still, and prayed. In that simple and childlike act new strength was given her, and she was enabled to think calmly of her state. She took care of her feet, removing their wet covering, and drying them in the warm hay. Then, finding that Abimelech had shut her in too closely, and that the air of the cell was still poisoned with smoke, she moved the hay from the opening, and lay down upon it, where she could look out upon the thickening darkness, and listen to the sighing wind and pattering rain.

XXXIV.

THE NIGHT.

THE night set in, wild and stormy. The rain increased, the gale blew fitfully, the far-off forest roared. With her hands clasped upon her breast, Charlotte lay gazing out into the dark, and listening to the storm, until the night, the wind, and the rain, seemed no longer anything of themselves, but a part of herself, and all within her own soul.

"O, heaven! O, grief! O, love!" were the thoughts that filled her universe.

The last glimmer of day had faded, and darkness lay like a thick substance on the earth, when the footsteps she had long expected came plashing through the snow.

"Cha'lotte!" said the voice of Mr. Jackwood.

"I am here!" breathed Charlotte, with a joyous thrill.

"I've brought ye some supper, and some dry stockin's," returned the farmer. "Where be ye?"

"Here!" and Charlotte reached out her hand. "O, Mr. Jackwood!"

"It's a dre'ful tejus night!" observed the farmer, getting down by the stack. "I wish you was safe to the house, once."

"I wish I was safe somewhere! But it is all well, good Mr. Jackwood. If I can be kept concealed here —"

"Sence Bim'lech told me o' the hole, I ben thinkin'," said the farmer, "'t would be as well. The men have ben to my house, — two come by the road, an' t' other acrost the meader; an' they'll be there agin, prob'bly, for they've got the notion that we know where you be. Oliver Dole was there, an' they made a s'arch in the barn, an' wood-shed, an' all over

the house; we could n't hender 'em, an' I thought it 'bout as well to let 'em have a good time on 't, long as you wan't there. Take your choice, though," added Mr. Jackwood; "if ye don't fancy stoppin' here, I'll git ye up to the house some way, and do my best to take care on ye, while ye 're there."

"Let me stay here; I would rather."

"How much room ye got? Dear me! it's quite a house, an't it? — I never see the beat o' that boy's mischief! I've told him, time an' agin, not to be makin' holes in the stacks; but I guess I'll let him off easy, seein' it's turned out so well for you!"

"You know," faltered Charlotte, "why I am here?"

"I kind o' ketched a little on 't, from what was said. But never mind about that. I'd as soon think of givin' up my own darter to 'em as you!"

Charlotte held the farmer's hard and knotty hand, and kissed it fervently.

"You need n't have no fears 'bout me," he continued, with hearty sympathy. "I guess Bim'lech Jackwood 'll turn out a perty sound kind o' wood, at heart. I told ye so, perhaps you recollect, the fust time 't ever I see ye: 't was in one o' these very meaders, but a leetle further down. I han't forgot it, if you have. Shall I send word to Mist' Dunb'ry's folks 't you are here?"

"O, no! — unless — unless Hector comes home!"

"Wal, we'll talk o' that to-morrow. Mist' Dunb'ry 'll be harder 'n ever on our country, now. He's English; and I don't know 't I ever talked with him in the world, 't he had n't some flaw to pick in our institutions. I've kep' up my eend o' the argument perty well, so fur; but I guess he 'll git the start o' me now. I should think he 'd move heaven an' 'arth to git you clear. What did he say about it?"

Charlotte's bosom heaved, and the farmer felt her tears fall upon his hand.

"Wal, never mind to-night. O! did I tell ye little Etty Grinnich stopped to our house, on her way hum? That was a good joke, sendin' the kidnabbers arter Bridget, while you got away! Wal, I don't know as there's anything more, 'less you 'd like to have me stay with ye a little while, for company."

"O, no!" replied Charlotte. "The rain is dripping on you."

"I don't mind the rain a mite. Besides, if you'd like to have me, I'll git a board off'm the stack, an' put it down here; then I'll set an' talk, while you're eatin' your supper."

Mr. Jackwood was going for the board, but Charlotte entreated him to give himself no more trouble and discomfort on her account. "Wal, good-night, then. You may depend on seein' some of us 'arly in the mornin'. But it's dre'ful tough," added the farmer, with compunctions. "The rain'll turn to snow, and it'll freeze up, tight as a drum, 'bout midnight. I'm 'fraid you'll be cold here; 'an' I d'n'no but you'd better go up to the house, arter all."

"No," said Charlotte. "You have done all you can. I wish I could thank you! — but — good-night!"

"Wal, good-night it is, then!" returned the farmer. "Keep up good heart — that's all I got to say. 'T'll all be right, — 't'll all be right, — in the eend."

Mr. Jackwood departed. Charlotte listened, as his footsteps went away in the dreary dark. Then she was once more alone; and the storm beat still, and the wind whistled, and the far-off forest roared.

In a thoughtful mood the farmer tramped on through the rain and snow. More than once he stopped, and was on the point of going back for Charlotte. It seemed to him, as he afterwards confessed, as though "suthin was goin' to happen;" and he could not feel right about leaving her.

"But I'll push on up to the house," said he, "any way; and then see how the weather acts."

Arrived, dripping wet, at the kitchen, he was astonished to find a burly, low-browed man sitting before the stove, in an attitude and with looks of dogged discontent. It was Dickson, who, after pretending to depart with his companions, had returned to spend the night in the suspected house.

"Why, what does ail you, father?" said Mrs. Jackwood, in the middle of the night. "How narvous you be!"

"I'm consarned about Cha'lotte!" replied the farmer. "I

felt sartin the wind 'u'd git round t' the north, and come off cold, 'fore this. If it keeps on rainin', there 'll 'be a foot o' water on the interval, by mornin'."

"You don't think the crick 'll break up, do ye?"

"No; 't an't thawed enough for that, — though the snow has gone off like smoke the last four-n'-twenty hours!" Mr. Jackwood tossed about sleeplessly for an hour or two longer. "I guess I 'll git up," said he, at length, "and see how the weather looks. It don't rain so hard as it did, and seems to me the wind sounds colder." He put on his clothes, and went out. "There's more rain fell than I thought for," he said, returning presently. "I do 'no' 'bout the crick. I guess I better go down an' git Cha'lotte up to the barn, to ventur'. — If 't had n't been for that plaguy kidnabber! I would n't begrudge a night's lodgin' to the wust enemy I got, but I could a' turned him ou' doors into the storm with a good stomach, if there 'd ben any way of gittin' red of him. I 'll take the hoss an' an umbrel, an' I guess we 'll git along."

"What was that?" said Mrs. Jackwood. "I thought I heard something on the stairs."

Mr. Jackwood went to examine, and met Dickson coming softly from the chamber.

"You 're up late," said the latter, with a sinister smile.

"I should ruther say 't was airly," retorted the farmer. "D' ye want anything p'tic'lar?"

"I come down to see if I could git a drink o' water."

"Wal, sir, that ye can have. The pump 's in here; 't 'll want primin'. If you 'll wait a minute, I 'll bring ye a glass."

"It 's a rainy night," observed Dickson.

"Terrible," said Mr. Jackwood, plying the wheezy pump.

"I hope that gal an't out nowheres!" returned the other.

"I hope not," said the farmer.

"Look a' here!" exclaimed Dickson, in an under-tone; "I 'm bent on findin' that gal; and 't an't no use her tryin' to git away. Now, I tell ye what: it 's my opinion you know where she is."

"I wish I did!"

“I’ve thought so, all along; and I’m as good as sure now. You an’t up at four in the mornin’ for nothin’. Now, be reason’ble, and own up. It’ll be better for the gal, for the job will be over with sooner; and it’s got to come, first or last. It’ll be better for you, too, in more senses than one. I s’pose you know the consequences o’ harborin’ or concealin’ a fugitive, and resistin’ the execush’n o’ the law? Now, look a’ here!” Dickson took a heavy purse from his pocket, and counted out some pieces of money. “There’s fifty dollars for ye, if you’d like to earn it.”

“Arn it? how?”

“By simply sayin’ three words that’ll set me on the right track. Ye don’t find fifty dollars in the dirt every day.”

“I should like to find fifty dollars well enough,” replied the farmer; “but I do’no’ ’bout pickin’ it out o’ jest that kind o’ dirt—even s’posin’ I could.”

Dickson felt encouraged. “I’ll make it—le’ me see—sixty, seventy, seventy-five. Now, there’s a chance! Come,”—looking at his watch,—“’t won’t pay to go to bed agin to-night, I reck’n; so, le’s set down and talk it over.”

“You’ll have to wait for me a little while,” said the farmer, taking down the lantern.

“You goin’ out in the rain?”

“Yes; I got to look to my hosses.”

“If that’s all,” cried Dickson, “I’ll go along with ye, and we’ll be talkin’.”

The farmer, exasperated, felt an impulse to smash the lantern in the villain’s face. Dickson smiled: in that smile there was low cunning and surly determination, which showed that it was useless to attempt, either by stratagem or force, to shake him off.

As they stood there, a fresh volley of wind and rain, lashing the kitchen window, filled Mr. Jackwood with fresh anxiety for Charlotte’s safety. He hurried forth, pulling the door after him; but Dickson wrenched it open with a powerful hand, and stalked to his side.

“None o’ that!” he growled, taking the farmer’s arm. “We may as well keep together, I reck’n. I don’t mind the rain.”

XXXV.

HECTOR'S JOURNEY.

It was a close, wet evening. Rolling vapors filled the sky. A crowd was gathered by the river, and a line of slaves, ranged along the wharf, held pitch-pine torches above their heads, to light a steamer coming up from the bay. Gradually the vessel approached, her slow wheels beating the water; cries passed from deck to wharf; the lines were flung out, and made fast to the shore; then came the rush and bustle of landing — friends greeting friends, porters shouldering luggage, carriages and wagons in attendance, and the flare of the torches wavering over all.

There was one passenger, among the first to land, who made haste to engage a hack, and rode away from this animated and picturesque scene. As the vehicle rattled through the town, he gazed listlessly upon the lighted shops, the gay saloons, and the glistening, muddy walks. Each spot was familiar to his eye; but how far-off, and cold, and idle, seemed all that life to the world of thought and feeling in his own breast!

Suddenly the carriage stopped. "What is the trouble?" — and he put his head out of the window.

"The Strikers!" said the coachman. Other vehicles had stopped. At the doors and windows of houses, on the steps, on the walks, appeared throngs of spectators, presenting a variety of complexions, rather remarkable to an eye unaccustomed to mixed races. The music of a band approaching floated upon the air; and Hector, looking in the direction towards which the many-hued faces were turned, beheld a grotesque procession. Then he remembered that it was New Year's Eve, the season of masquerades; and that the STRIKERS were one of the famous societies which, by

their fantastic displays upon that anniversary, make Mobile the rival of Rome and Venice in their gay carnivals.

A double chain of torch-bearers, with dusky faces and bare arms, like those upon the wharf, marked the line of the procession. In front burned the cabalistic characters of the order — “S. I. S.” — upon an ornate and showy standard. Then (wonderful to behold!) came marching out of the fabulous past, out of the realms of fiction, out of the covers of books, the heroes of Romance: Amadis of Gaul, the Cid, and Arthur, with knights of the round table, in gorgeous panoply; Pantagruel, Rabelais’ creation, of vast and laughable dimensions; and Don Quixote, grim with courage, mounted on the boniest of steeds, and accompanied by his doughty squire, striding a grave animal of a long-eared race. Ivanhoe, Robin Hood, and the fantastic Wamba, came after. Then might have been witnessed the edifying spectacle of Tom Jones and Gil Blas, walking arm in arm; Mr. Pickwick and Oliver Twist; Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, the three guardsmen, world-renowned; and the Count of Monte Christo in conversation with the Wandering Jew. Leatherstocking, and some of Cooper’s Indians, appeared conspicuous; and Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday marched in the midst of the procession. Many of those that followed were unknown to Hector; but there was no mistaking Hudibras and Orlando Furioso, who brought up the rear. Uncle Tom, by a singular oversight, was not represented, except accidentally, perhaps, in the figures of the torch-bearers.

The procession tramped on through the thin and slippery mud, the glare of the torches growing sombre and misty in the distance; and Hector, who had dismounted from the coach, was about resuming his seat, when a hand touched his shoulder.

“I had to put on my giasses to make sure ’t was you!” cried a cordial old gentleman, grasping his hand. “Where did you come from? Where are you going?”

“I landed ten minutes ago from the steamer, and I am on my way to the Battle House.”

“The Battle House? I suppose you know the Strikers give a grand entertainment there to-night! You shall see the last of the Mohicans dance in his war-paint and feathers, and make havoc

with the hearts of the ladies. Don Quixote and Sam Weller may be expected to vie with each other in gallantry, and Rip Van Winkle shall show himself wide awake after his twenty years' nap. Meanwhile, why won't you jump into my carriage, and ride with us to Royal-street?" cried the old gentleman. "You must see the Cowbellions. And, I'll tell you what, your baggage shall be sent to my house, and you shall make us a visit."

He would listen to no objections; and Hector, who had in fact no very grave objections to advance, accepted the invitation. The old gentleman's carriage was close by. It contained two ladies, — one a fine-looking, middle-aged person, arrayed with considerable magnificence; the other younger, of a more delicate beauty, and a more thoughtful and spiritual countenance.

"My sister, Mrs. De Rohan," said the old gentleman, indicating the elder of the two, "and my niece. Ladies, Mr. Dumbury."

"I expected to see Helen," said Hector.

"She is preparing for a ball. After witnessing the show, we will try to get home in time to see her off. Drive on, Parchment!" — to the colored coachman. "Royal-street."

"Yes, massa," said Parchment, proudly drawing up the reins. Royal-street was found impassable; and Parchment, consulting his master, brought the span to a halt upon an eligible corner. Another procession was approaching; and the crowds were dense. First came the band, in dashing uniforms; then followed, amid a throng of servitors, the colossal effigy of a milk-white cow, with extraordinary horns, a wondrous length of tail, and luminous eyes, — all hung with festoons of ribbons, and with silver bells.

"These are the Cowbellions, I suppose, Mr. Copliff?" said Hector.

"Yes, that is the venerable name of the society," replied the old gentleman.

"What a whimsical caprice!" exclaimed the elder of the two ladies.

"A caprice, Mrs. De Rohan," said her brother, "which has grown in power and popularity for some twenty years. I was once a Cowbellion myself," he added, with self-complacency.

"You!" cried Mrs. De Rohan. "Dear me! what is the meaning of those outlandish costumes?"

"I should think the entire mineral kingdom had marched out of the bowels of the earth, to parade in Royal-street!" said Hector. "Observe, upon that coal-black steed, that coal-black rider with a block of sea-coal for a head."

"Old King Cole himself!" ejaculated Mr. Copliff.

"Precious Stones sparkles superbly in contrast," said Hector. "To his knees he is all garnets; his breast is of onyx, his arm of ruby, his thighs sapphire, and his head of pure diamonds! How ludicrous Chalk looks, coming after! He is as white as ten millers. There is Iron, and Silver, and Gold; and, look! there comes the vegetable kingdom, — animated melons, colossal cauliflowers, and beets on horse-back!"

"A repetition, a plagiarism!" cried Mr. Copliff. "We had the vegetable kingdom thirteen years ago, when I was a Cowbellion. I was a cabbage-head. You never saw anything so green. My leaves covered me to my waist; I think a hungry ox might have eaten me, without discovering the difference. I was constructed of pasteboard and green silk. Observe Sir Carrot!"

"Where?" asked Mrs. De Rohan, raising her eye-glass.

"Yonder, travelling in company with a friendly potato," said Hector. "He is the magnified image of a little fellow I pulled out of my father's garden last summer. His yellow limbs are the forked roots, and his head branches out naturally into a luxuriant adornment of tops. How do you like it, Parchment?"

Parchment, showing his magnificent teeth: "Aw — I — massa — it's mos' superfluous!" — meaning superb. "De Strikers is n't a suckumstance, dis year, my 'pinion!"

Mrs. De Rohan: "Is not there the animal kingdom, behind?"

Hector: "I hope not; for we have seen enough. But there it comes, truly! It looks as if three menageries and the inhabitants of several cedar swamps had been picturesquely mixed, and marched into Mobile."

Parchment, shaking: "Look a' dat ar great big alligator, on his hind legs! Dems what ye call jaws!"

Mr. Copliff: "Look out for the span, Parchment; they may take fright. What's the matter?"

"I declar', massa," articulated the coachman, "I's laughed till I's powerful weak!"

Hector had become suddenly thoughtful. Dragons, serpents, monstrous frogs, men with lion's heads, men with tusks and trunks men with beaks and wings, and men with tails, moved by him unobserved, in the torches' smoky light.

"Are you tired of it, Dunbury?"

"O, no!" Hector started. "But my mind was elsewhere. I did wrong to accept your invitation; I'm not in a social mood to-night."

"You will find a sympathizing companion in my niece," said the old gentleman. "I believe she has not spoken since you joined us. Ah! there is Adam and Eve, the last of the animal creation, and the end of the show. Have we seen enough, ladies? Drive home, Parchment! By the way, Lucy, tell Dunbury about — what was the name? Your favorite. He is from the north, and may give you some information and advice."

"That is not probable. But," said the niece, after some hesitation, "it is easy to state the facts. I had a favorite, as my uncle rightly calls her —"

"I remember the name now!" cried Mr. Copliff: "Camille."

How the shock of that word smote Hector's heart!

"She was by nature a rare character; and during the few years she lived with me," said Lucy, "she developed wonderfully. Although my servant, she was more like a younger sister; and I treated her as such."

Mr. Copliff: "There you were wrong," — dogmatically, — "totally wrong, Lucy. But you know my principles; and we will not argue that point. A person, born of a slave mother, should not, on any condition —"

"You did not know Camille, uncle, or you would never repeat your celebrated axiom," said the other, with a smile.

Mr. Copliff, indulgently: "Well, well, my dear, go on."

"Circumstances, which I need not explain," — the speaker's voice faltered, — "removed Camille from me at a critical and

dangerous period. It was not in my power to intercede, and she was sold. Are you interested?"

"Much," spoke Hector, betwixt the beatings of his heart.

"I think it was horrible!" exclaimed Mrs. De Rohan. "I have not come south to interfere with your blessed institutions, brother," — with sarcasm, — "but you must allow me now and then to express a meek opinion. I think the idea of a young girl, like Camille, being sold —"

Mr. Copliff, wincing: "Go on, Lucy."

"Until very recently, I was not free to make any efforts in her behalf," said his niece. "But Camille had been brought to this city, from New Orleans; and on my arrival here, three days ago, I went personally to search her out. I applied to the man who purchased her; when, imagine my astonishment to learn that she had made her escape to freedom!"

Hector could scarce refrain from clasping the speaker's hand, in the sympathy and exultation of his spirit.

"This interests you, I see. But hear the rest. I thought it natural that the man would dispose of his claim upon the poor girl for a mere trifle; and I resolved that, if within the limit of my means, I would secure it; for I had hopes that she would communicate with me at no distant day, and then I could have the gratification of giving her her liberty, and insuring her safety should she choose to return to me."

"And you bought the claim?" breathed Hector.

"I did not; I will tell you why. 'Had you proposed the thing a month ago,' said the man, 'you should have had her for a song. Now it is different.' 'How different?' I asked. 'Because then I had no hopes of ever hearing from her again.' 'But now —' 'Now I have hopes,' said he, with a confidence that stunned me."

"Here we are at home!" cried Mr. Copliff. "Wait and finish your story, Lucy, after we get in. We will indulge in a little refreshment; then, if you like, Dunbury, we will ride around to the Battle House, and call on the Strikers. Keep the carriage up, Parchment."

Hector could not speak. Mechanically he helped the ladies down, and accompanied them into the house.

"I have but a word to add," said the younger of the two. "There was a stubbornness and independence in the man, upon which I could make no impression. He declared that, as matters stood, he would sooner risk an entire loss, including the expense he had incurred in the hope of recovering Camille, than sell his claim for less than eight hundred dollars."

"That is exorbitant!" exclaimed Mr. Copliff. "I would never give that."

"But if she is brought back, it would require a much larger sum to purchase her. Consider, she is a beautiful —"

"But fugitives are not brought back so easy, my dear woman; so don't be alarmed. Ah! there comes Helen, for our criticisms on her ball-dress!"

A beautiful girl, of rather petite figure, but voluptuously formed, made her appearance in a superb white attire, with jewels glittering on her arms and in her hair.

"Well done!" cried her father. "There, Dunbury," — turning with a smile of pride to Hector, — "what do you think of that?"

Helen started back, with a blush, at sight of her father's guest; but, recovering herself presently, she advanced, self-possessed, with a smile of welcome, to lay her delicate white-gloved hand in Hector's. He took it coldly, and with a few formal and commonplace words, uttered with effort, bowed stiffly, like an automaton.

"Is that New England gallantry?" cried Mr. Copliff, in a rallying tone. "Come to me, darling; I will teach our cool friend southern etiquette." He bent down and kissed her tenderly upon both cheeks. "There, go, my pet! You have a great deal of snow and ice in Vermont, have you not?" turning again to Hector.

"In their season," said the young man, without a smile. "We have fiery skies, too, in their turn. There is a time for everything under the sun."

Mr. Copliff perceived the pale anxiety of his face, and changed his tone. "Well," pressing his hand heartily, "we will not quarrel about sectional differences. Let me show you to your quarters. You will find your baggage there before you."

"Mr. Dunbury has something to say to me," interposed his niece, gently, "if my impressions do not deceive me."

"They do not!" exclaimed Hector; "I have something to say to you."

Mr. Copliff looked from one to the other, in astonishment. "You are two incomprehensibles! You have progressed, for a short acquaintance. Come, Mrs. De!" And, giving his sister his arm, he led her with lofty politeness from the room.

Then Hector turned to Mrs. Graves.

"You knew I wished to speak with you!" he said, eagerly.

"I felt it!" exclaimed Mrs. Graves. "About Camille."

"You are right. I know her. And, through her, I know you!"

"I thought so. Tell me of her! Where is she?"

"In my father's house. I have come to make terms with — the man who calls himself her owner! I supposed he would dispose of his claim for any trifle. I hope I have not arrived too late! If she has been discovered (that is what I fear), she must be saved; she must be bought."

"O, truly she must! I am not rich —"

"Nor I! But what I have I count but as straw in the balance with her happiness! In my pocket-book is a draft for five hundred dollars. By some means, — I do not yet know what, — I must raise the remainder by to-morrow morning."

"Depend upon me for that," cried Mrs. Graves. "I claim the privilege of doing at least so much —"

"Generous heart! — as if you had done nothing for her yet! O," said Hector, "you should hear her speak of you; it is always with such gratitude, such love! For her sake, I accept your contribution. Some day I shall be able to repay it, with interest! Then I will thank you! Pardon my abruptness now, — excuse me to Helen —"

"You are going?"

"I shall try to send a telegraphic despatch this evening. When I return, you shall know all about Camille."

Hector was intercepted in the hall by Mr. Copliff.

"What now?" cried the old gentleman.

"I was about to demonstrate the coolness of my Vermont temper, by taking an unceremonious leave. I shall return in half an hour. I have thought of a little matter of business — a telegraphic despatch —"

"Is it so important? Then let Parchment drive you to the office. Make haste to return, for supper will be waiting."

"Thank you a thousand times!" and Hector mounted the carriage, and rode away.

"What success?" asked Mrs. Graves, half an hour later, meeting him in the hall.

"Dubious! I cannot learn until to-morrow whether the despatch will go through to its destination."

"We must be patient, and have faith till then!"

"Faith!" answered Hector. "O, to-morrow! to-morrow!"

"Wish yer happy new year, massa!" said old Juno, the cook, looking up, and showing her good-natured face and broken teeth, as her master came muttering down the stairs.

"I wish you a hundred thousand!" growled Dr. Tanwood, tying his cravat, "and as many children!"

"Laws bless us! what 'u'd a' ol' 'oman do with so many new-years as dat, say not'n' bout de chil'n?"

"Plague your masters with your everlasting clatter! There's no use trying to get any sleep in this house!"

"Laws, Massa! han't ye no idee what time o' day 't is? Clock struck ten 'mos' 'n hour ago. Been a gen'l'man waitin' for ye, dis half-hour!"

Buttoning his waistcoat, and sweeping his fingers across his hair, Dr. Tanwood crossed the hall-floor, and entered his office.

Hector was in waiting.

"I hope I have not disturbed you —"

"O, not at all! I've overslept myself a little this morning." The doctor looked in the glass which hung opposite the door, and brushed his hair over his forehead. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Hector was pale; his heart beat strong and fast. "I come to you from Mrs. Graves" The doctor fixed his searching glance

on Hector. "Touching the affair she spoke with you about, the other day—"

"I remember," — and the doctor nodded, with a peculiar smile.

"She is desirous to know if any circumstances have occurred to alter your decision."

"And if there have?"

"In that case, I am authorized to treat with you."

The doctor sat silent for near a minute, his dark eyes studying Hector, from beneath their gathered brows.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "circumstances have occurred to alter my decision."

"Well?"

"For eight hundred dollars, I think it was, I engaged to make over to Mrs. Graves my claim upon the girl Camille."

"The sum she named," assented Hector.

"She thought it too much." The doctor leaned over, and tapped the table significantly. "But, as matters now stand, it is not enough. Prospects have risen; and my terms have gone up in proportion."

"Sir," said Hector, "I do not understand. Your terms—"

"A thousand dollars, cash in hand," said the doctor; and, with an indifferent air, he smoothed down the lock of hair that lay low upon his forehead.

"You must, then, be extremely confident—"

"Confident?" The doctor laughed. "Sir, I'll wager the price of her, that in a week, at the furthest, she'll be seen in Mobile! Then no money will buy her."

A dizzy blur darkened Hector's vision. He leaned his head upon his hand. He saw the danger that threatened Charlotte clothed in all its terrors; and money seemed but as water to be poured out for the security of her peace. Unfortunately, he had but little more than eight hundred dollars at his command, and to make a final offer of that was all that he could do.

"Not qu-i-t-e enough!" said the doctor.

"Then," said Hector, "I must confer with Mrs. Graves."

"Very good sir!" And, with a sinister smile, the doctor arose to bow his visitor to the door.

Tortured with doubts, Hector hurried from the office. He hastened to find an old friend, his former employer, of whom he hoped for aid: he was absent from the city. Though stunned momentarily by the news, he lost no time in idle regret, but, mounting a coach, rode to the house of an eminent physician, whom he knew. He was engaged at a consultation, and none could tell when he would be home. Again in the coach, Hector held his impatient spirit, until the slow vehicle brought him to the door of a benevolent citizen, of whom he had formerly received so many kindnesses that he had reason to hope for more. The bell was muffled, and a colored servant opened the door noiselessly. The master was dangerously ill, and could see no one.

Foiled again in his purpose, Hector thought of Mr. Fobbles, a merchant, to whom he had once rendered an important service, and who had ever since been loud in his protestations of friendship. In less than a quarter of an hour, the two were standing face to face. Mr. Fobbles was delighted, and invited the visitor to walk home with him to dinner. Unceremoniously, Hector named the object of his visit. Mr. Fobbles would have been rejoiced to accommodate him; "but, indeed, sir, and indeed, sir! nothing could have happened so awkwardly!" At any other time he could have taken so small a sum out of his pocket, and given him; "but losses, sir, payments, perplexities —"

Hector broke impetuously away. Mr. Copliff was now his last hope. He had dreaded to call on him for money, being his guest. But his fears for Charlotte overcame every other consideration. He reached the office. Mr. Copliff had just gone.

"Where?"

"To New Orleans, on business; he will be back this evening."

Ten minutes later, Hector came upon his old friend, Joseph Spalding, like an apparition.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed the young lawyer, "are you substance or shadow?"

"Substance," uttered Hector, "since I seek substantial aid. Give me two hundred dollars!"

"That sounds like flesh and blood," said Joseph; "but, tell

me, did you ever know the time when I had two hundred dollars ? ”

“ Spendthrift ! — no ! ” cried Hector. “ But you should have it ! My more than life depends upon it ! ”

“ Is it so serious ? ”

“ Joseph, I have no time for words. Can you get me the money ? ”

“ True,” said Joseph, “ I ought to be able to raise so small a sum, and I will ; but I do not see how I can possibly have it for you before to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow ! there ’s an eternity betwixt now and then ! ”

Hector returned to Mrs. Graves. She grew pale at the sight of him. Words were needless to report his ill-success.

“ I have nothing at my immediate command,” she said. “ What I gave you this morning, I borrowed of my uncle. Until he returns — ”

“ I have a better thought ! ” cried Hector. “ Can I see Mrs. De Rohan ? ”

Mrs. Graves left the room, and the other lady entered. She was a woman of the world ; no more like her spiritual companion than the moon is like the stars ; but benevolence beamed in her face, and beneath the gay externals of her life throbbed a warm and generous heart. Hector approached her confidently.

“ I have a confession to make to you, Mrs. De Rohan. I have not been quite true with you. I met you last night as a stranger.”

“ And was I not so ? ”

“ Not altogether, madam. The mention of your name startled me ; then, when I heard it remarked that you were from Canada, I remembered you.”

“ You had seen me, then ? ”

“ I had heard of you. You must recollect a young girl who partly engaged herself as your travelling companion — ”

“ Indeed ! Miss Woods ! A charming person ! how much I have thought of her since ! And you know her ! ”

“ Mrs. Graves knows her. It was of her she spoke last night — ”

"Of her — Miss Woods! — Camille?"

"They are the same!" And, without giving the other time to recover from her astonishment, Hector poured forth the history. In his manner, his voice, his looks, there was an energy that swept everything before it. The other hesitated not an instant. She demanded neither reasons nor explanations. She left the room, and, returning straightway, placed in his hand a purse of gold.

"Take it!" she said, "and may it serve your purpose!"

Her features were suffused, her voice tremulous, her eyes filled with tears. In the name of Charlotte, of humanity, of Him whose mission was to loose the bonds of the oppressed, he uttered his thanks, and hurried from the house.

Once more he confronted Dr. Tanwood. The doctor smiled, and, bowing with ironic civility, invited him to a seat.

"Thank you," said Hector. "I have seen Mrs. Graves. And if you will please draw up the bill of sale —" The words sounded strange and awful in his ear. A bill of sale, as of some property: a horse, or an ox; a bill of sale of a human soul! Of Charlotte! of his *own wife*!

The doctor, smiling still: "If I will draw it up —"

"I am prepared to comply with your terms."

The doctor leaned over the table, and with gloating deliberation fixed Hector with his hard, vindictive eye.

"But if my terms should not be precisely the same as two hours ago?"

"Sir?"

"I have had news; and the presumptive value of my property is increased."

"Is this, sir, — is this honorable dealing?"

"Call it what you please! If you deal with me, you will take what terms you can get."

"Will you, then, be so good, sir," — Hector spoke calmly, but with a kindling fury in his look, — "as to name your ultimate terms, that I may know what to depend upon?"

"Certainly; if it will be any satisfaction. Splice on two hundred more, and you have it."

"Twelve hundred?" articulated Hector.

"Precisely," smiled the doctor.

"Will you have the kindness to put it in writing?"

"Certainly, when you produce the cash, provided live stock has not taken another sudden rise."

At this brutal allusion, Hector felt a dangerous leaping of the blood. With fixed teeth, and lips compressed, he produced his pocket-book. Two checks, one of five hundred dollars, the other of three hundred, he laid upon the table. Then, resorting to Mrs. De Rohan's purse, he emptied out a heap of British gold. There was near double the amount he had asked for; and, making up the requisite sum in small bills, he shoved it towards the doctor.

"Is that satisfactory?"

"No!" burst forth the doctor, and he smote the table fiercely; "not for twelve hundred, nor twenty hundred, nor twenty times twenty hundred, will I quit my claim upon that girl!"

A ghastly pallor chased the flush from Hector's cheek.

"Can I know," — his voice was forced, but calm, — "can I know why I have been made the subject of this treatment?"

"By —! you can. I shall delight to show you! Look!" — he threw back the hair from his forehead, and revealed a rugged scar, — "do you know that? do you know me? do you know *this*?" And, snatching from a drawer a handkerchief stained and stiff with blood, he thrust it in Hector's face.

Hector stood upon his feet, and with rigid features kept his firm look fixed upon the doctor's tiger-eyes.

"Are you satisfied? Do you understand me now?"

"At least, I understand you!" answered Hector. "We have met before. I know you now. Revenge may be just and noble. But, sir, let it fall on me. Do not make another — an innocent girl — its victim.

"Your name is *here*," — the doctor shook the handkerchief, — "*here*, blotted by my blood! and *there*," — striking a letter upon the table, — "I hear of you in connection with your innocent girl! I put the two together. And, sir, the owner of that name shall see her make a pleasant journey back to Mobile, and stop her if

he can. There 'll be sport, I reckon, before the job is over; take my word for it! And now, sir, allow me the pleasure of wishing you a good-day."

"I have a word," said Hector. "I shall not argue; I shall leave the business in other hands. But there is something struggling here,"—his hand was upon his breast,— "and it must forth! I met you once; you attacked me. I shivered a tumbler in your face. In self-defence I did it. In self-defence I may do something more. Be warned! Press not too far! Justice sets bounds to vengeance. You will but beat your head against the rocks, and bring them down upon you. As God exists, and heaven, the day that sees Camille again in your power will be the blackest, the most tragical, of your life. Remember!"

"We shall see!" said the doctor; but he spoke less jeeringly than before. "If I live, the girl shall be brought back!"

Hector went forth from the house. In the street he met a friend. It was Joseph. Hector stared, without appearing to recognize him.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Joseph, "how haggard you look! What has happened? See, I have borrowed the money; I was on my way to find you."

"You are kind, Joseph, but there is a trouble which money will not heal!"

"Who knows? Come to my office. There's no telling what money can do. Give me your case, and trust to me for the result."

"Ah, Joseph, had I charged you with it in time! But it was too sacred. And now it is too late! And while I am here, wasting time and strength, there are those at home dying of despair in my absence!"

XXXVI.

THE INUNDATION.

It was about an hour after Mr. Jackwood's departure from the stack, that Charlotte had observed a change in the storm. The wind went down, and the rain, which had all the evening kept up an incessant pelting and dripping, began to pour in torrents. Every other sound was lost in its wild rush and roar. It fell in this way for hours; until her spirit, lulled by the solemn monotony, forgot its pains, and sank into the oblivion of sleep.

She was aroused by startling sounds in the night. She crept to the opening of her retreat, and looked out. The intense darkness had given place to a faint grayish glimmer in the sky; but it was raining still, although less violently than before. The sounds were repeated.

"Ho, ho! ho, ho!" Two strange, prolonged, inhuman cries! Then Charlotte heard footsteps plashing in the water which covered the meadow, and caught a momentary glimpse of a dim, ghost-like figure moving by the stack. It passed from sight; and the plashing of footsteps became lost in the spattering and bubbling of the rain. Then again, at a distance, after a long pause, the shouts arose, and died away in a long, plaintive, desolate wail

"Ho, ho! Ho, ho — o — o — o!"

Faint echoes came from the sullen hills; and the rainy silence followed. Charlotte felt an unaccountable impulse to leave her retreat, and go wandering up and down in the night and storm, uttering her soul in cries, like the mysterious being that had passed. Her sufferings of body and mind had sent the flame of fever into her blood, and in her sleep a light delirium had surprised her brain.

“Ho, ho! Ho, ho — o — o — o!” sounded the cries again, fainter, and further off, in the night.

She climbed over the wet hay at the mouth of the close and heated cell, and reached forth her hand towards the ground. It was plunged to the wrist in an icy pool. The cold storm beat upon her face and neck. Chilled by the shock, she withdrew beneath the shelter, and tried once more to sleep. But the air was stifling; her flesh burned with the fever; her temples ached with dull, heavy pains. In the anguish and despair of her state, she threw herself once more upon the wet hay, moaning, with face and arms and breast exposed to the rain. The bath revived her. Again raising herself upon her arm, she perceived that her hair was dripping wet. It had been drenched in the pool. She put out her hand again, and discovered, to her consternation, that the water was rising round the stack, and creeping, creeping, slowly and steadily, into her retreat.

Her consciousness was now fully restored. She held her breath, listening intently, and gazing out into the darkness. The gale had risen again; the storm lashed the stack; and all around, the rain gurgled and murmured. For some time she had been half-conscious of hearing a faint roar in the distance. It approached, and grew distinct; and now her mind was alert to comprehend the mysterious noise. It seemed at first like a mighty wind, pouring through forests of reeling and crashing trees. Sharp and clear reports, like thunder-claps, were mingled with the roar. But the noise came from up the valley, where there were no woods; and the peals cracked and echoed along the ground.

Then it seemed as though an earthquake were driving its plough, with whirlwind and thunder, through the valley. Nearer and nearer came the din. Charlotte stood out in the storm, and, clinging to the fence, she beheld a glimmer and a flash, as of rolling snow and foam. It came down the valley, in the track of the riving thunder. And now the sounds resolved themselves into the splitting and crashing of ice, and the impetuous rush of waters. The creek was breaking up, and a flood was inundating the valley!

The convulsion passed; the din and detonation echoed down the stream; but already the stack was surrounded by billows. They

dashed through the fence, and leaped up, drenching Charlotte's feet, as she endeavored to climb beyond their reach. The flood rose rapidly; the fence was low; and, in the extremity of fear, Charlotte got upon the shed. The sheep were beneath, bleating piteously, and swimming around the stack. The steers had run out frantically, at the approach of the inundation; and now, as the engulfing waves overtook them, their bellowings of brute terror sounded dismally above the roar.

All this had passed in a brief space of time; and now Charlotte found herself alone upon a frail and insecure structure, in the midst of a wilderness of waters. Masses and fragments of ice and snow went drifting by in the night. Some of these struck the posts that supported the shed, and made it tremble and creak beneath her weight. The fence, meanwhile, went to pieces, the rails floating off, one by one, in the current.

And now all the stories Charlotte had heard of freshets in the valley, that came sweeping away bridges, and flocks, and herds, recurred to her imagination with exaggerated terrors. She remembered that Mr. Jackwood had related many of these, always boasting that, thanks to his superior forethought, he had never yet lost either horse, or horned-beast, or sheep. Why had he, who was so versed in signs and changes of the weather, forgotten himself upon that night, of all nights, and left her there to perish? Up to this hour she had been dumb; but now the fear and delirium of her soul found expression in a long, piercing cry.

A burst of wild laughter answered from the stream. She gazed in the direction of the shout, and perceived a dark shape drifting by upon a cake of ice. With a shudder of horror she remembered the cries she had previously heard, and leaned forward eagerly to watch the floating mass.

"Hurra! hurra!" shouted the mysterious being, as if he had been the demon of the flood.

"Edward!" shrieked Charlotte.

The shape rose up to the stature of a man, dimly discerned in the darkness, and began to leap, with grotesque gestures, upon the ice.

"Edward! Edward!" implored Charlotte.

He reached forth his arms; a cry of recognition, of joy, came from the flood. But suddenly there was a dull explosion, the ice went asunder, and the shape disappeared amid the agitated fragments. Two or three strangled cries, a little bubbling and splashing; then the waters swept on, and the ice drifted away in the darkness.

Aroused by the sounds in the valley, Mr. Jackwood rushed out, Dickson still keeping doggedly by his side. Abimelech followed, buttoning his jacket by the way.

"Give us a helpin' hand!" shouted the farmer, throwing open the barn-doors. He seized the boat, that was housed there for the winter, and dragged it from its place. "To the crick!"

"If it's for that gal," cried Dickson, "say the word, and I'm yer man!"

"Stand away!" said the farmer, through his teeth; and alone, by main force, he dragged the boat to the bank. "Bring a pail or suthin, Bim'lech! Where's the oars?" The oars were found; Abimelech came running with a dipper to bail with; Mrs. Jackwood brought the lantern; and the boat was launched in the sweeping current. "Git in, Bim'lech!"

"The ol' thing 'll leak like a siv!" said the boy, as he scrambled aboard.

Mr. Jackwood was about to follow, when Dickson stepped in before him.

"Git out o' there!" exclaimed the farmer, fiercely.

Dickson possessed himself of the oars. "I reck'n 't 'll be as well for me to keep you company; I feel an interest in that gal."

"You've done enough for her, and for us, too! Will ye git out? We're goin' to pick up the drowndin' sheep, an' there won't be room!"

"I'll help as much as I'll hender, I reck'n!" retorted Dickson, — and the lantern shining upon his face showed it dark and determined. "Come on. I'm a powerful hand at the oars."

Mr. Jackwood glanced around. Had his eye fallen upon any sort of weapon, the impulse that prompted him to knock the villain into the water would have led to a struggle. He hesitated

but a moment, however. Delay might prove fatal to Charlotte. And the swift thought flashed through his brain, that, in case of her rescue, it would still be time to deliver her, by desperate means, from the hands of the kidnapper.

"Gi' me the lantern!" and, taking it from the hands of his anxious wife, he stepped aboard, and shoved clear of the bank.

"That's the wisest thing you could do," growled Dickson. "It'll be jest my cussed luck, if that gal's drowned! I'm certain I heard yells off in this direction. But I'll have the wuth of her out o' somebody, — you may make sure o' that!"

"She might git on the cattle-shed," said the frightened Bim.

"Look a' here, boy! was she hid anywheres about that stack? I've had that in my mind ever since I quit it; and I'm mad, now, that it did n't burn up!"

"Give me an oar!" said Mr. Jackwood.

"You 'tend to your steerin'!" answered Dickson. He plied the oars vigorously with his powerful arms. Mr. Jackwood sat in the stern, and steered out upon the dark and whirling flood. Abimelech, in the bow, held the light. At first the current carried the boat rapidly down stream; but, having crossed the channel of the creek, they came upon the comparatively still sheet of water that overspread the meadows.

"Bim'lech," said Mr. Jackwood, "hold up the lantern as high as you can reach!"

The boy placed it on his head, and stood up in the bow; the light shining round upon the gloomy waves.

"Sit down! you'll fall!" cried his father.

"No, I won't!" said Bim, grasping the lantern with both hands. "O-o-o-o! see that big junk o' ice!"

"How fur be we from the stack?" asked Dickson.

"Hold your oars a minute!" cried the farmer. "I don'no 'xac'ly where we be."

"There's the old elm!" cried Abimelech. "An' there's the knoll beyend!"

"Are you sure on 't?" — Mr. Jackwood strained his eyes in the darkness. — "I guess you're right. Go ahead."

Dickson had taken advantage of the pause, to sound the water

with his oar. "T an't over two foot deep!" he declared, in astonishment.

"It's high ground here," said the farmer. "It's lower where the stack stands."

"Your valley, tucked in here 'twixt the mountains," observed Dickson, pulling again at the oars, "is like the bottom of an almighty big tunn'l, with the crick for the spout. Any man that's used to the country should 'ave knowed better than to leave even a dumb beast down here in sech a storm."

Already Mr. Jackwood was suffering unspeakable trouble of mind on Charlotte's account; and a reproach from such a source filled his hot heart to choking fulness.

"Who'd a' knowed," cried Bim, "'t was goin' to rain so like gre't guns? See, father! it's turnin' round cold, jest as you said 't would! The rain's more 'n half snow, now!"

"Be still, Bim'lech!" said the farmer, in a hoarse voice.

"Hello!" ejaculated the boy, "there's the fence. There's only jest the top-board and the ends o' the posts out o' the water. O-o-o-o! a little more, an' you'd smashed right into it!"

To pass the fence, it was necessary to drop down once more towards the channel of the creek. They had not proceeded far when they found the boards torn away, and the posts broken down. It was at the spot where the crushing mass of ice, arrived at a bend in the stream, had overswept the banks, and rushed down towards the stack. As they passed the fence, Dickson rested on his oars, and shouted. No reply.

"I thought I heard a sheep bl'at," said Bim. "Father! look out for them bushes!"

"Pull away!" cried the farmer.

"I heard somethin'," Dickson declared. "The stack can't be fur off, now."

"There!" exclaimed Abimelech; "that was a sheep! It bl'ated agin! I see the stack!"

"Your eyes are better 'n mine," said Dickson, glancing over his shoulder. "I see somethin', though, out there in the dark."

"Why don't she answer, I wonder? If she's on the shed, I should think she'd see the light, and call us," said Bim.

"Jest my luck!" growled Dickson. "It makes me mad to lose a gal that way!"

"Keep your light out o' my eyes!" cried Mr. Jackwood, as, gazing over the bow, he stared in the direction of the gloomy mass.

"Had n't I better be bailin' a little?" asked Abimelech, frightened. "The boat's 'most half full o' water!"

"Hold your lantern!" said his father, sternly. A yellow glimmer of light touched the stack. The shed was not yet visible.

"We're on the wrong side!" said Bim. "How did that happen? — O! see them sheep!"

The boat passed the stack, and came around under its lee. By the light of the lantern, a number of sheep could now be seen huddling together in the eddies, and holding their noses above water against the side of the stack. As the boat approached, one of them was seen to lose its hold, and, after a struggle to regain it, fall into the current and disappear. It passed within reach of Mr. Jackwood's hand, but his eyes were fixed elsewhere.

"Where is your shed, — I'd like to know?" demanded Dickson.

"O!" exclaimed Abimelech, — "father, see! it's gone! the shed is gone!"

Mr. Jackwood sprang up in the boat, thrust his feet in the notches left by the roof of the shed, and mounted the stack. It was his last hope. But no Charlotte was there. Only her shawl, which he found freezing fast to a board, against which it had blown, remained as a memento of the night of terror she had passed in that fearful spot.

Dickson was not satisfied with Mr. Jackwood's examination. "Here, boy!" said he, "give me the lantern, and take this oar. Hold it so-fash'n, and keep the boat up against the stack."

Abimelech obeyed, and Dickson mounted the stack, after the farmer, lantern in hand.

"O!" screamed the boy, "the boat's goin' off, and I can't help it! Father! come!"

Mr. Jackwood was gazing around upon the waste of waters, in a state of stupefaction, when Abimelech's cries aroused him.

"Reach me the eend o' the oar!" he exclaimed, springing to the side of the stack.

"O! quick!" cried the boy, "hold the lantern, you man!"

"I've got ye!" said Mr. Jackwood. "Keep tight holt!" And he drew the boat alongside.

"Why did n't ye do as I told ye?" growled Dickson. "The curr'nt pushed the boat against the stack, and all you had to do was to keep the bow from swinging round. Are ye a fool?"

"Darn that man!" said Bim. "I wish he was drowned!"

"Hush, Bim'leeh!" said Mr. Jackwood, stepping into the boat. "Gi' me the oars."

"What a' ye 'bout?" demanded Dickson, hastily descending the stack. "Come back here! Take me aboard!"

"I got to look out for them 'ere lambs," said Mr. Jackwood, rowing around the stack. "Hold the lantern over on this side."

Dickson perceived that he was in a precarious position, and that his wisest course would be to comply with the farmer's request. He accordingly climbed over to the opposite side of the stack, and held the light, while Mr. Jackwood pulled the sheep, one after another, over the bow of the boat.

"There's only five out of 'leven," said Bim. "But I'm glad there an't no more; we should sink. O! the water almost come over the side, then!"

"Here! an't ye goin' to take me aboard?" asked Dickson, with increasing alarm.

"Not with this load," replied the farmer. "I told ye there would n't be room."

"Look a' here!" remonstrated Dickson, "there's room enough there!"

"I've got to bail like anything!" exclaimed Bim, plying the dipper. "Don't ye go back, father! I'd leave him there, — I would!"

"Tend to your bailin', Bim'leeh!" said Mr. Jackwood, solemnly.

"An't ye conin'?" cried Dickson. "Don't leave a feller in this way, now! Han't ye got no human feelin's?"

Mr. Jackwood made no reply, but rowed steadily and strongly across the stream. Dickson roared with wrath.

"He's changed his tune, han't he?" said Abimelech. "He's good to hold the lantern; we can see the light, and tell where we be. Hear him swear!"

"Never mind him," answered the farmer. "Look ahead, there, and see if I'm runnin' into anything."

"These sheep can't stand on their legs!" said Bim. "They lay right down in the water, and I han't hardly got room to bail. Say, father, ye don't think Charlotte's got drowned, do ye?"

"Are them bushes ahead, there? 'Tend to what I tell ye!"

"We've passed all the bushes, I guess. I don't see none. — I bet she got off the interval, somehow; *I* could. Where do ye s'pose she's gone to?"

Mr. Jackwood rowed steadily until the boat struck the ground; then stepping ashore, with the boy's assistance he drew the bow up out of water.

"You won't be afraid, will ye, if I leave ye to take care o' the lambs? You can git 'em up to the barn some way, if you haf to take one 't a time."

"Where ye goin' to bring him from the stack?" asked Abimelech, timidly.

"Not jest yit," replied his father.

"I do' wanter stay alone!" exclaimed the boy. "Le' me go to the house with ye, and git Phoebe or Rove to come and help with the lambs."

"Come along, then," said the farmer. They had emptied the water out of the boat, leaving the sheep in it; and, having taken the precaution to drag it a few feet further upon the snow, they set out for the house.

"Where do you s'pose Charlotte is?" inquired the boy, keeping close to his father's side.

"All you've got to do is to git the lambs up; so, don't ax no more questions," said the farmer.

Arrived at the barn, he bridled a horse, and took him from the stable; then, without waiting to say even a parting word to his family, he mounted at the gate, and rode away in the darkness.

XXXVII.

RUMORS.

"DAUGHTER," said Squire Greenwich, crossing his legs and saddling his spectacles upon his knee, "this Sabbath morning appears a fitting occasion, and we will proceed to a settlement." The smack of his precise lips was an awful sound to poor Etty. She came forward, trembling and weeping.

"The child is down sick, this morning!" interceded the mother.

"Mrs. Greenwich!" said the paternal head, "your assistance is not called for. Put down your hands, daughter." Etty's right hand dropped by her side. "I said, put down your hands!" Down went the left, and up went the right. "D-a-u-gh-t-e-r!" pronounced the squire's warning voice. After a violent struggle with herself, Etty uncovered her pale face and inflamed eyes. "Look at me, daughter!"

Etty raised a timid glance to her father's face; but a glimpse of Robert's threatening visage opposite immediately put her out of countenance.

"The poor child has such a cold in her head and eyes!" interposed the mother.

"Mrs. Greenwich! how many times have I to request that you will not interfere with my discipline? Daughter, innocence is never afraid to look justice in the face; but guilt is fearful and downcast. We cannot proceed until that I have your eye."

A painful scene followed, during which the affrighted child endeavored to obey. Her father's discipline was strict as mathematics; and she could no more escape from its laws, than she could make an equilateral triangle with four sides.

"That will do," he said, at length, as, with a powerful effort of will, she fixed her burning gaze upon the end of his nose. "Now I will have your motive for visiting Mr. Dunbury's people, without permission."

"I was at cousin Charles', — Robert was playing chess with cousin Josephine, — nobody minded anything about me; and, as I wanted to see Miss Woods —" Etty looked down again. She felt Robert's piercing gaze, and forgot to keep her eyes fixed on the paternal nose.

"Go on, daughter. Your eye!"

"That is all. I am sorry I disobeyed you, but —"

"It remains," said the paternal head, inhaling a pinch of snuff, "that you should show sufficient cause for taking so unusual and unladylike a step. We might imagine circumstances which, by their apparent necessity, would palliate the offence, and abate somewhat of the punishment. Have you anything of that sort to advance?"

Robert looked daggers into the child's very soul, and she was silent.

"Daughter, hold up your right hand!"

"Don't be too severe, Mr. Greenwich! Consider, the poor child is down sick —"

"Mrs. Greenwich!"

"I beg pardon!" and Mrs. Greenwich shrank again into appropriate insignificance.

"The sentence is this: you, daughter Henrietta, for the faults committed and confessed by you, are condemned to solitary confinement at home for nine days and an equal number of nights, commencing from this hour. During this time, you are to partake of no nutriment but bread and water; and speak to no one person but the paternal head. For each transgression of these regulations, one day shall be added to your term of punishment."

Etty burst into tears. The punishment seemed greater than she could bear.

"Still, if you can advance any sufficient reason for walking through the wet snow to Mr. Dunbury's house, and perilling your health, I shall be gratified to hear it."

Etty gave an appealing look to Robert. He knew all ; for, on returning home the night before, and telling where she had been and what she had seen, he had seized her as an eagle a lamb, and torn out the heart of her secret. But he was merciless ; he held her with his terrible eye, and opened not his mouth. She would not have wished him to convict himself, to spare her ; she chose to suffer, rather than see his guilt exposed ; but she felt that a word from him might soften her father's severity, and turn aside the sharpness of the penalties.

"You're a brave girl !" he muttered, passing by her ; "only go through with it as you have begun !"

He stepped to the door to admit a visitor. It was cousin Charles Creston, a chatty little man, who had called to discuss the occurrences which — to quote his phrase — were agitating the whole village !

"Etty brought us the news last night," said Robert, carelessly.

"Bless you !" cried the chatty little man, "then you have n't heard the tragical termination !" Robert, with evident alarm, said he had not. "It's distressing ! I dropped into the tavern, just now," said the voluble Charles ; "the slave-hunters had just come in, and all the talk was about Charlotte's being drowned last night. There can't be any mistake," he added, eagerly ; "for one of the men passed the night at Mr. Jackwood's. Charlotte was hid in a stack, when the creek broke up, and the valley was flooded."

"O, Robert !" burst forth Etty.

"One day more added to the nine, my daughter," pronounced the paternal head.

"Pshaw !" said Robert, with an incredulous air, — but his face grew deadly pale, — "I don't believe the story ! If 't was true, the men would not be so ready to report it."

"Why not, since they would wish to give their version first ?" cried Mr. Creston. "They throw all the blame upon Mr. Jackwood ; and they are doing all they can to make themselves popular, by treating every loafer in the village who will drink with them. But 't won't do ; there's a tremendous excitement against

them, and there's talk that they'll get tarred and feathered, and rode out of town on rails. I'd delight to see it!" chuckled Charles.

"Son Robert!" called the squire, — Robert had seized his hat, — "where are you going? If to the tavern, listen to the paternal counsel, and forbear. Son Robert, do you hear?"

Son Robert gave no heed. "Remember!" he muttered, as he passed by Etty's chair. He left the house; hastened to the tavern; moved for a few minutes amid the excited crowd; then, mounting a horse, galloped down the splashy road, with his fierce eye fixed upon the lake that spread over the valley.

Throwing himself from the saddle at Mr. Jackwood's door, he knocked for admittance; but Phœbe and Abimelech were alone, locked up, as in a fortress. Only Rover's sharp bark answered from within. Robert walked around to the back door; and Phœbe, observing him from the window, ran, with a fluttering heart, to admit him.

"Are you alone, Phœbe?" asked Robert, in a hollow voice.

"The folks have gone to meeting; but Bim is here," replied Phœbe, with extreme coldness of manner. "Come in, — if you like." It was his first visit since his desertion of her, some months before; and the memory of her wrongs swelled up within her. He did not stop to flatter her, or excuse himself; but broke forth at once with inquiries for Charlotte. Phœbe burst into tears.

"I'd give my life," he said, — and remorse and despair were gnawing at his heart, — "to know that she was safe! She was an angel, Phœbe; and she was your best friend."

"I know it now!" sobbed Phœbe. "But you made me believe she was not! Why did you?" And she went on to tell the tragic tale. Robert's soul smote him, as he listened; and when it was finished, without a word he staggered to the door, mounted his horse, and rode back, gnashing his teeth, to the village.

O, noble heart of woman! how little thou art known to selfish man! How little, stooping to low ends of worldly advantage or pleasure, thou, fairest spirit of God's visible universe, knowest the sovereignty of thine own power! Be thyself! — Come up from

the mist of worldliness that shrouds thee, let the glory of divine love shine through thy purer image into the heart of man, and thou shalt see him rise into new being ; thou shalt see his soul, expanding, burst its chains of passion and take wings ; thou shalt see thine own true mission then begun, if not fulfilled.

Hector, baffled and impatient, was waiting in Mobile for the steamer to sail that was to take him on his homeward journey. But for the influence of woman soothing and restraining him, his racked mind could scarce have borne its suffering and suspense. How could he have lived through those torturing hours (he afterwards wondered within himself), had it not been for her who encouraged him to wait, and trust, and to meet all things by heaven ordained to discipline and teach us, with a calm and patient faith, believing in the good ! Mrs. Graves, who had before been Charlotte's friend, was now his. On the evening of the day following that of his transactions with Dr. Tanwood, they sat together in the parlor of Mr. Copliff's house. In the midst of their conversation, Helen entered, and, taking an ottoman, seated herself at their feet.

"I have n't told you about the ball," she began, in her joyous tones. "I had the honor of dancing with Robinson Crusoe, Sancho Panza, and the Wandering Jew. That saucy Count of Monte Christo had the impudence to offer me his hand ! Do you remember" — her voice changed, and she looked up with glistening eyes into Hector's face — "how often I used to sit with you so, a year ago, and make you talk to me ? But you do not talk to me any more now !"

"Ah, Helen ! you will know some day what a mountain rests on my heart !" said Hector.

Helen dropped her face upon her cousin's lap, and sat for a long time very quiet and still ; but at length, sad thoughts stealing over her, she began to weep, and, ashamed of her emotion, she sprang to her feet, and hurried from the room.

"Helen is a good girl," said Mrs. Graves, with thoughtful tenderness. "Your friend Joseph thinks it the one great mistake of your life, that you did not marry her."

"O, Joseph is kind ! Had I looked only for beauty, for wealth

and honorable connections, even for a gentle and tender heart, Helen would have been everything I could desire," said Hector. "But what are all those attributes, compared with such a soul as —"

"Speak the name! I love to hear it from your lips."

"I am very weak," said Hector.

"No, I think you strong! Your devotion to poor Camille gives me an inspiration as when I read of heroic deeds. In my experience in this groping world, I had almost abandoned the hope of finding a man who could penetrate with the clear glance of truth the thick walls of prejudice and conventionality, which shut us out from the realities of existence. This appears all the more glorious in one who possesses a great power over the human heart, for evil or for good, — like you."

"O, could I but feel that I have always used that power for good!" said Hector.

"Your whole life moves like a panorama before my eye," resumed the other, after a pause. "It is pure, compared with the world's. But you have attained luminous heights, from which, looking down, the paths you lately trod appear all dark and soiled. It is well to contemplate them at times; for the sight, repelling you, gives you a nobler impulse to ascend."

A sudden spasm convulsed Hector's features. "She calls to me!" he said, faintly. "Just now her cry of anguish shot through me, — nothing could be more terribly real!"

The door opened; he looked up, with a start, as Joseph Spalding entered. "What news?"

"Have you heard from your telegraphic despatch?" asked Joseph, drawing him aside.

"No; but you have something for me!" cried Hector.

"You are right," faltered Joseph, with a painfully embarrassed manner. "I received this evening a request to call on Dr. Tanwood."

"Speak out!" exclaimed Hector. "What has been done?"

"After our previous interview, you can imagine that a polite note from the doctor took me by surprise. My suspicions were aroused, and I went prepared —"

"For heaven's sake, omit details, and come to the point!"

"I found the doctor extremely civil; he brought out his decanter, we drank, and came to business," said Joseph. "On reflection, he had concluded to accept our offer. 'On reflection,' said I, 'we have concluded to withdraw it.'"

"Withdraw it?" echoed Hector.

"Certainly," said Joseph; "for I was sure that if he would take any sum, he would take less."

"What have you there?" demanded Hector. "A letter, — for me!"

"You shall have it presently," remonstrated Joseph, more and more troubled; "but hear my story!"

"Give it me!" cried Hector, alarmed and impatient. There was a struggle, and he seized it. Mrs. Graves ran to Joseph, who gave her an appealing look.

"It will kill him!" he said. "There is a telegraphic despatch."

"From Camille?"

"From the hunters of Camille; it came to Dr. Tanwood. It is terrible! Hector!" said Joseph.

"Drowned!" gasped Hector, clutching the paper. "They have killed her!" He tore away from his friends, and rushed out in the direction of Dr. Tanwood's house, furious to know the truth, and to confront the author of his calamity. Joseph ran after him; but neither force nor entreaty could restrain the frenzied man. Fierce and rapid strides brought him to the doctor's door; Joseph still clinging to his arm, and urging unheeded words of counsel and consolation.

The doctor was gone from home.

XXXVIII.

MR. RUKELY'S GREAT SERMON.

MR. RUKELY had been all the week engaged in preparing his great sermon on the "Duties of Christian Citizens in the Present Crisis;" a theme adjudged highly appropriate to be considered on the advent of the New Year. No other discourse he had ever written had cost him so much labor as this. On Saturday night it was finished. But the young minister's excited brain would not let him sleep; and towards morning he lay thinking of what he had written, and imagining the effect it would produce upon his congregation, until he felt an irresistible impulse to get up, strike a light, and read over certain passages, which contained the strong and eloquent points of the sermon. His movements awakened his wife. "Don't be disturbed, my dear," said he. "I am going to write a little."

Bertha, languidly: "I thought your sermon was finished."

Mr. Rukely, rubbing a match: "It is, my dear. But there are one or two things I want to alter."

Bertha, rubbing her eyes: "I don't see how you can better it. What you read to me last night seemed as good as it could be."

"If I remember rightly, it sent you to sleep, my dear."

"It was n't the sermon, — 't was the rain. What a storm we have had! — I am afraid you won't see so large a congregation to-day as you expected."

Mr. Rukely, with his fifth match: "The people are looking for my sermon on the New Year; and I think there will be a pretty general turn-out to hear it, unless the roads should be too bad. There is a lively interest in the church to know what view I take of the subject. It is generally supposed that —"

"You'll burn your fingers!" cried Bertha.

"I hope not," replied Mr. Rukely, with a placid smile, dropping the match. "Where is the lamp?"

"You must have left it in the other room, where you were writing."

In ten minutes Bertha was once more sleeping soundly, while the young minister corrected and interlined passages in his sermon, by the sitting-room fire. He read aloud to himself. "The great danger consists in taking narrow and sectional views of a subject which should only be regarded in a broad, national light. Let us remember that the interests and safety of the country are at stake. If we would preserve intact the noble heritage bequeathed us by the fathers of American independence, we must listen to the dictates of an expanded and lofty patriotism, and suffer no northern or southern prejudices to sully the bright—"

Mr. Rukely thought he heard a voice. — "Did you speak, my dear?"

"I thought you called me," said Bertha, half awake.

"I was reading," replied Mr. Rukely; "I had forgotten that I was not in the pulpit. If you would like to hear me, I will leave the door open."

"Certainly," said poor Bertha.

"Tell me," added her husband, "if you observe any expression that will be liable to misconstruction. It is an extremely delicate subject, and every statement should be worded with care. Watch closely."

Bertha promised, and Mr. Rukely resumed his reading. Having finished a passage, he called for her criticisms. "To tell the truth," said Bertha, arousing herself, "my mind was wandering again. Do I understand that we are not to protect a fugitive?"

"Is it not just?" cried the minister. "Have we a right to peril the welfare and happiness of a nation, by espousing the cause of one man, against the laws made to protect and regulate all?"

"It is clear," answered Bertha, "we have no such right." And she fell again into a light slumber, while her husband went on with his reading. Having completed another strong passage. "Is not that argument conclusive?" he asked, triumphantly.

Bertha, starting: "Entirely so! — But — I am not sure that I have fully grasped the idea. Will you read the last few sentences again?"

Mr. Rukely complied readily. But, in the midst of a lofty and eloquent strain, he was disagreeably interrupted by a noise from the kitchen. "What's that?" cried Bertha.

"Some person at the back door. I wonder who can be stirring at this hour?"

"Sunday morning, too!" said Bertha.

The minister wrapped his morning-gown about him, and, stepping into the kitchen, pushed back the bolt, and turned the key in the lock. The day had scarcely dawned. It was snowing fast. A man stood out in the storm, supporting a human figure upon a horse.

"Make way, Mr. Rukely!" said the man. "'Tan't no time for words, an' I'll ax pardon for intrudin' some other time." As he spoke, he suffered the figure to sink upon his shoulder; then, clasping it in his arms, he bore it past the astonished minister, into the house.

"What is the trouble?" cried Mr. Rukely.

"The fust thing, help me git this 'ere poor gal to a fire!" said the man.

"This way!" exclaimed the minister, throwing open the sitting-room door. "Here, sir! — Wait a minute!" He wheeled the sofa to the fire, and assisted him to place his burden upon it. "What has happened to her?" putting back the girl's wet hair, and arranging the cushion beneath her head. "Good heavens! Charlotte Woods!"

"She's ben drowned, an' then 'most froze to death!" uttered the man, in a choked voice. "Where's your wife?"

"Bertha!" cried Mr. Rukely.

"What is it? Did you say Charlotte?" articulated Bertha, rushing out from the bed-chamber. "Drowned?"

She flew to Charlotte's side, and bent over her, pressing her temples with a frightened, eager gaze. "Charlotte! where have you been? What is the matter, Mr. Jackwood?" she demanded, wildly.

"'T would be a long story ; we 'd better be gittin' her dry an' warm fust," said the farmer, rubbing Charlotte's cold hand.

"Be calm, my dear !" remarked Mr. Rukely. "I will call Matilda —"

"Who is Matilda ?" interrupted Mr. Jackwood.

"Matilda Fosdick, who is living with us," said Bertha.

"Livin' with you ?" echoed the farmer. "That's bad ! But she can keep a secret, can't she, when a human critter's life depends on 't ?"

"What do you mean ?" cried Bertha.

"You han't heard nothin', then, o' what happened up to Mr. Dunbury's, last night ?"

"We have heard nothing !"

"Never mind ; you 'll hear quick enough ! — If Matilda is a gal to be trusted, call her up. She 'd haf to know Cha'lotte was in the house, some time or 'nother, I s'pose. The fust thing to be thought on is to git dry clo's on to her."

"Help me roll the sofa into the bed-room," cried Bertha. "I can undress her, and put her into my bed."

"We 'd better call the doctor," said Mr. Rukely. "He is a trustworthy man, and if there 's any necessity for concealment —"

"We 'll talk about that," said Mr. Jackwood, "arterwards." He assisted in wheeling the sofa into the bed-room, and, leaving Charlotte in Bertha's charge, took Mr. Rukely aside. — "You 're a man," said he, earnestly, "'t I respect above all others ; for you got talents an' larnin', an', more 'n all that, your heart 's in the right place. What I should 'a done for Cha'lotte, if 't had n't ben for you, I do'no'. Her an' your wife's old friends —"

"For mercy's sake," interrupted Mr. Rukely, "tell me what the trouble is !"

"I do'no' over-'n'-above well, myself," said Mr. Jackwood. "It's suthin 't I can't realize nor believe ; but, as I understand it, Cha'lotte 's a fugitive, an' the kidnabbers are arter her."

"A fugitive !" echoed the astonished minister.

Mr. Jackwood : "I han't heard her say nothin' 'bout it," — with a glance towards the bed-room, — "but one thing 's sartin, — the officers are arter her, — they 've ben to my house, and to

Mr. Dunbury's, — an' she 's ben out all night in the storm, to keep away from 'em."

"A fugitive! Charlotte Woods!" repeated Mr. Rukely aghast.

"She was hid in a stack," added the farmer; "but the crick broke up, and drowned her out. She got up on the shed; but that was put there arter the winter set in, and the ground was froze: the posts wan't set at all, and the thaw left 'em loose, so 's 't when the water come they washed right away. As good luck would have it, the ruf was made o' rails; they was held together with cleats; then there was a jag o' straw on top, that had settled, and kep' 'em solid. So, when the ruf tumbled down, Cha'lotte, it 'pears, stuck to it. I tell ye what! it gi' me a start 't I shan't git over in a hurry, when we went to the stack in a boat, an' found her missin'; but her shawl was on the stack, and suthin kinder said to me, 'That never could got there, in this world, 'ithout she was on the shed!' Then says I, 'I made that 'ere ruf myself, an' I believe it's held together; an' if 't has, what 's the reason she can't be swimmin' on 't, like a raft?' I thought it over while I was gittin' the lambs into the boat; then the idee come to me, 't if I was to take a hoss, an' ride down to Osborne's Flats, I might hear suthin of her. There 's a place down there, — p'raps you don' know, — 't makes a big, shaller basin, when the crick rises up to it; there 's al'ays a kind o' whirlpool there, time o' freshets, where flood-wood, an' everything o' that kind, settles in, an' swims round, sometimes, for half a day, 'fore 't goes off down the crick. I knowed the road, an' could find the flats the darkest night, with a hoss; but I felt ticklish about vent'rin' in the boat. So I jumped on ol' Dan, an' started off. I found the goin' dre'ful bad; but I got along perty well, till I come to the Turnpike Crossin'. The water was higher 'n I 'd ca'c'lated on, an', to git to the flats, I 'd haf to cross the crick somehow. The water was clean over the road, an' Dan didn't like to wade; but I put the whip on to him, an' we got to the bridge. The deestriet 's built a famous good high bridge over the crossin'; an' there I stopped to let Dan breathe, an' to look round. It was jest beginnin' to be daylight, an' I could see off to'rds the flats; but I could n't make out nothin';

an' it looked so awful dreary down there, 't I felt sick, an' thought 't was no use, arter all, huntin' in sich a place for Cha'lotte. But suthin said, 'Don't give up so,' an' I splashed forward, on t'other side o' the bridge; when, as I was cheerin' ol' Dan, I thought I heerd a noise, an' stopped. 'Hello!' says I. 'Ma-a-a-a!' says suthin, over a knoll, jest above me. 'Nothin' but a sheep,' says I; 'but I'm blamed,' says I, 'if it did n't sound, for all the world, like one o' my lambs!' Then I looked sharp, an' see suthin lodged agin the knoll. Wal, sir, 't was that shed-ruf, an' Cha'lotte was on to it, holdin' tight to some bushes to keep from floatin' away! I never had anything come over me like that 'ere! But the danger wan't over with yit; for, if Cha'lotte was to le' go her hold o' the bushes, there was nothin' to hender her gittin' into the main current that run 'neath the bridge. 'T was one o' the maddest currents I ever see; an' 't would ben a mere chance if the ruf wan't tore to pieces, passin' the 'butments. 'Stick to it, Cha'lotte!' says I; 'it's me!' says I. 'Don't be afraid!' says I. Dan did n't like to leave the turnpike, but he'd ben in the water up to his breast a dozen times a'ready. I thought he need n't mind goin' a little deeper; so I put on the whip, an' swum him to the knoll. I got hold o' the raft jes as Cha'lotte gin out; she was nigh-about dead when I lifted her ashore. But, sir, don't ye think, all this time she had kep' two o' them 'ere lambs from drownin'! She'd helped 'em out o' the water, on to the ruf, when the shed fell, — for they could n't got on to it alone, with all their swimmin', — and then she'd took as much care on 'em, arterwards, as if there wan't no danger to her, an' all she had to do was to look out for them! I got 'em on to the knoll, an' then lifted her on to ol' Dan. Then the thing on 't was to git back with her to the turnpike. But I was perty sartin the hoss could touch bottom, an' keep his nose out o' water, if we both rode; 't want fur, any way; so I mounted behind Cha'lotte, an' drove in. He is a dre'ful kind hoss, ol' Dan is, an' he seemed to know jes's well what he was about as I did; for he made a bee-line to the turnpike, and went as stiddy as a steamboat!

“Wal, we got to the bridge; then I did n't know no more

what to do 'n I did in the fust place. I could n't take Cha'lotte to my house, nor to Mr. Dunbury's, for the kidnabbers are as thick over there as nine cats in a corn-basket. When I was considerin' on 't, I happened to say, 'We an't sich a terrible ways from where Mrs. Rukely lives; she that was Bertha Wing. It's in the north village,' says I, 'right down opposite the flats.' All this time I hardly knowed whuther she was alive or dead; she'd only said, two or three times, 'O, Mr. Jackwood!' an' laid on this 'ere arm, jes' like a child; but when I said '*Bertha Wing*,' it seemed to put new life into her —"

"Mr. Rukely," whispered Bertha, at the bed-room door, "will you hand me that blanket?" The minister took a garment that was heating by the stove, and passed it to his wife.

"Wal," said Mr. Jackwood, "that's the long and short on 't; and now that she's safe in your house, I feel like a new man. She's ben through a dre'ful tough night, an' she may have a fit o' sickness arter it. If we can keep the kidnabbers away till she's well enough to be got off to Canada, that's all I ask for. What do ye think?"

"I think — I am in a dream!" exclaimed Mr. Rukely. "Charlotte Woods! What a history you tell me! Do you think she'll be safe in my house?"

"I've an idee!" said Mr. Jackwood, drying his trousers by the fire. "It popped into my head as I was comin' over here from the turnpike. The kidnabbers'll think she's drowned! Don't ye see?" And the farmer proceeded to relate his experience with Dickson, whom he had left holding the lantern at the stack. The inference was, that if Charlotte was supposed to be drowned, the kidnappers would abandon the search.

"But if the story should get out," suggested Mr. Rukely, in his bewilderment.

"Jest make sure o' Tildy Fosdick, and I don't see how it anyways can!" said Mr. Jackwood. "For my part, I shan't let on to my own family 't Cha'lotte's found. Then where's the danger? You han't no scruples agin keepin' her, of course!"

"No scruples, — that is, the laws of the country—"

Mr. Jackwood smote the palm of his hand with his fist with an energy that made the other start. "I — I tell ye what!" cried he, in a determined tone. "I respect the laws, an' I don't think I'm a bad citizen, gen'ly speakin'! I don't go in for mobs an' lynchin', nuther! But, come case in hand, a human critter's o'more account to me than all the laws in Christendom! 'As ye do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me;' that's my doctrine. Christ never stopped to ask whuther 't was lawful to do a good deed, but went and done it! But, excuse me, — you're a minister, an' you know better about them things 'n I do."

Mr. Rukely grasped the farmer's hand. His eyes glistened, and there was a noble emotion in his face. "You can depend upon me," said he, fervently.

"God bless you sir! I knowed it!" cried Mr. Jackwood, the tears coursing down his weather-stained cheek. "When there's a duty to be done to a feller-mortal, you an't the man to stop an' look arter the consequences."

"Not in such a case," said Mr. Rukely. "I find" — wringing the farmer's hand again — "that there's a difference between reasoning from the intellect and acting from the heart."

"You must have found out that long ago, sence you've begun arly to preach from the heart. I heerd one o' yer sarmons once; 't was on the uses o' the Sabbath; an' one thing you said in it has stuck by me to this day. You said, 'Christ is a law unto himself, and he who has his spirit within him,' you said, 'can do no wrong.' That spirit is love, an't it?" cried Mr. Jackwood; "'t an't policy; and it han't nothin' to do with compromises."

"True!" said Mr. Rukely. "It is love, and with it goes faith; and with faith, earnestness and courage, such as yours!"

Mr. Jackwood brushed away his tears, and held the minister's hand in both of his. "I han't no more to say; but, if I don't come down an' hear you preach to-day, 't'll be because I can't git over! I must be goin' now; my folks'll be consarned about me, an' I ought to git away f'm here 'fore people are stirrin'. I on'y want to say a cheerin' word to her, then I'm off!"

Bertha had packed her friend away in the warmest kind of a nest; and there the farmer found her, unable to move hand or foot, for the comforters that enveloped her, but not unable to smile a faint smile of affection and thanks upon her preserver. "Mr. Rukely's all right!" he whispered, bending over her. "So don't worry; you're safe!"

Charlotte murmured something; the farmer did not hear the words, but he felt the thought, for it shone gratefully in his countenance; and, turning away quickly, to prevent a tear from falling upon her face, he called Bertha and her husband.

"The best good-by I can say is to leave her in your charge. I'll hear from ye all, some time!" The farmer's voice was stifled. "Wal," — with an effort, — "remember I'm comin' over to hear you preach to-day!" He mounted his horse at the door, and rode away in the storm. Then Mr. Rukely thought of his great sermon lying upon the table, and of Charlotte lying there in the bed-chamber: the one, a creature of his brain, a tissue of ingenious theories and precepts; the other, a living reality, a child of the One loving Father; a being of vital breath, affections, aspirations, and an immortal soul.

"Will you see if that brandy is hot?" asked Bertha, from the bed-chamber. The brandy was not hot; and Mr. Rukely, glancing furtively towards the chamber, took his great sermon quietly from the table, and thrust it into the stove. "What are you doing?" cried his wife.

"I am heating the brandy," my dear.

"That was your sermon!" exclaimed the astonished Bertha.

"My sermon?" repeated the minister. "Well, I hope it will do good! I shall preach an old one, to-day; that one on the uses of the Sabbath, which you must remember, since Mr. Jack-wood recalls it to my mind, and quotes from it. I shall preach my sermon for the new year next Sunday."

Mr. Rukely was ordinarily a man of such cool temper and calm judgment, that Bertha, who had never known him do so impulsive a thing in all his life, thought him insane.

"As soon as you have leisure," said he, "I will give you reasons for what I have done. They will surprise you more than the action itself."

Bertha administered the hot brandy, and rubbed Charlotte's limbs until she got them warm; when the patient appearing to sink into a slumber, she left her, to hear her husband's story. Ah! if there was a difference between writing a sermon from the head and living one from the heart, so was there between hearing one with the ear only, and feeling one in the soul! Bertha was awake now; Bertha no longer gave a cold and drowsy approval of what she heard; Bertha, whose thoughtless tongue, like many another thoughtless tongue, had said yea and amen to plausible theories a half-hour since, astonished her husband now by the energy and passion with which she espoused Charlotte's cause.

"I did well, then," said he, "to burn the sermon!"

"I only know," replied the excited Bertha, "that a thousand sermons could not change me with regard to Charlotte! What shall we do with Matilda?"

Matilda could not be kept in ignorance, if she remained in the house; neither could her services be well dispensed with at that time. It was accordingly agreed that the safest way would be to confide the secret to her, and rely upon her fidelity. She was called from the chamber; and Mr. Rukely sat by Charlotte while Bertha, in the other room, awaited the girl's appearance.

Miss Fosdick came down with her hair uncombed, and her dress unhooked, looking ill-humored and sleepy. "'T an't late, after all," she said, looking at the clock. "It's Sunday morning, I thought I could lay abed."

"I had some news to tell you," replied Bertha.

"O, have you? What is it about?"

"You know Miss Woods, at Mr. Dunbury's?"

"O, I know of her; though I'm not personally acquainted," replied Matilda, simpering. "People say Hector is paying attention to her. I don't care, I'm sure; though I might have been in her place, I suppose. You did n't know, perhaps, that Hector came for me, the very day he found Miss Woods at your house? I'd been two terms to Kiltney; and Mrs. Dunbury wanted me for a companion. I should have gone, only you know I an't obleeged to go out for a living; and while we was talking it over, Livia and Patra made such a fuss, all through

jealousy, that I concluded to stay to home. Well, Miss Woods went in my place; but I don't care — she is welcome; though, if I had taken up with the invitation, who knows what might have happened? 'T an't as though I was in such a great hurry to get a husband! But what about her? Are they going to be married?"

"Matilda, it is very sad news I have to tell you!"

Matilda, brightening: "Is it? I am dying to hear!"

Here Bertha, deeply affected, told the story of Charlotte, yet concealing the fact that she was at that moment sleeping in the adjoining chamber. Matilda could not sufficiently express her wonder and astonishment.

"And what would you do," asked Bertha, "if she should come to you, and you could help her escape?"

It is not to be denied that Matilda felt a secret delight in Charlotte's misfortune. But, aside from the natural envy and selfishness of her disposition, she was not a bad-hearted girl; and she gave the answer Bertha desired she would. It was as much pride, perhaps, as genuine benevolence, that would have been gratified in rendering assistance to one in Charlotte's position; but Bertha did not stop to analyze her motives. She believed her sincere; it was all she asked; and then proceeded to unfold the remainder of the story.

Charlotte, meanwhile, passed from the sleep or stupor that had taken possession of her senses into the pain and delirium of fever. Alarmed by her restlessness and moaning, Mr. Rukely rapped on the door for Bertha. She entered; Charlotte appeared to awake, and she spoke to her; but the poor girl, not recognizing her, called for Hector to give her a glass of water.

"Here, dear Charlotte!" said Bertha, raising her head, that she might drink.

"No!" The sufferer put her feebly away. "Hector! where is he?" She looked wildly about the room. Bertha endeavored to pacify her; but she no longer knew her friends.

"I dreamed," said she, "that somebody was drowned in that horrid place! Tell me, was it Hector?"

XXXIX.

HOW DICKSON TOOK LEAVE.

ON his way home, Mr. Jackwood met Corny riding out of Mr. Dunbury's yard. "You 're stirrin' arly, young man," said the farmer.

"Ya-a-s," drawled Corny; "I got to go for the doctor."

"Is Mis' Dunbury was agin?"

"'Pears so; they thought she was dyin' one spell. They an't nobody to hum, now, but Bridget an' the ol' man. Hector's gone; an' I s'pose ye heard about Charlotte."

"If you 're goin' for the doctor," said the farmer, "I won't hender. I guess I'll step in a minute, an' see if my folks can be of any sarvice."

The farmer entered at the kitchen door, which was opened by Bridget. "Faix!" cried the girl, "I was never so glad wid the sight iv a Yankee face since the day I was barn! They 're havin' the craziest time here that iver was! Not a wink have I slept, ahl the whole blissid night, but jist a little this marnin'. I was woke fifty times 'fore the peep o' day, if I was iver a once. But it's not a straw I'd be carin' for it ahl, if I could only jist cure my eyes wid seein' the daar, swate face of Miss Charlotte, afther ahl the throuble an' fuss. I was hopin' ye'd be tellin' ye'd seen her. And Mистер Edward, ye've seen nothin' of him? He's the crazy man, that's been kickin' up ahl the row. It begun wid his coomin' here yisterday. Och! it was a shabby thrick he played me up in the woods there, lavin' me to get the hoss around afther the seoundrels had cotched us. He followed 'em back doon the river; and there I worked, a'most ahl the night, tryin' to turn the cutter in the woods, an' backin' the hoss out o' the brush an

snow. Faix, it was beginnin' to be dark an' lonesome up there ; an' what should I be afther doin', but lavin' the cutter where it stuck, an' ridin' home man-fashion, wid the harness for a saddle ! ”

“ Where is yer crazy-man now ? ” inquired the farmer.

“ I balave the divil has him carryin' him off ! ” cried Bridget. “ He was up ahl the night, wild as a brindle cat, an' the last I was hearin' on him, he went out howlin' in the starm. But it's little I throuble mesilf about him ; only I tha'ht he might be knowin' what had coom on Miss Charlotte. If he'd but jist be bringin' her back, then he might go to Bedlam, where he belongs, — bad luck to him ! ”

For four mortal hours Dickson had kept solitary watch upon the stack. During this time he saw the lantern burn dimly, then go out, and broad day dawn upon the valley and the flood. The weather was growing cold. Only a fine hail fell, mixed with sleet. The straw of the stack froze into brittle glass, and the boards bound upon it became slippery with ice. Dickson would have suffered from the cold and discomfort of his situation, but that his rage kept him warm. At length he saw Mr. Jackwood walk leisurely across the fields with Abimelech, to the water's edge, launch the boat, and row out towards the stack.

“ I thought per'aps you 'd be impatient to git ashore, ” remarked the farmer.

“ Any time ! ” muttered Dickson, through his teeth.

“ If he waited long enough, he could cross on the ice, ” cried Abimelech. “ The water 's all scummed over, a'ready, where it don't run fast. ”

“ Hush, Bim'lech ! ” said Mr. Jackwood. “ Doin' my pertiest, I could n't save all them dumb beasts. I 've lost one o' the likeliest pair o' two-year-olds ever raised in the county. The lambs I don't care so much about, though they 'd a' ben as han'some wethers as anybody's, come spring. Sorry to keep you waitin' . ”

“ It 's all right, ” growled Dickson. “ I shall have my pay for this, I reck'n ! ”

“ Wal, you 'd oughter ! ” exclaimed the farmer. “ A man 't

puts his hand to your kind o' business deserves to git his pay. Don't forgit to hand down that 'ere lantern. Then we'll go to breakfast."

As the wrathful Dickson paid no attention to the request, thinking only of getting his feet safely planted in the boat, Mr. Jackwood quietly put out his oar, and shoved off from the stack.

"We can't see to git up to the stack, till he holds the lantern," chuckled Bim.

"Hush, Bim'lech!" said his father. "Thank ye,"—as the man, stifling his wrath, handed down the lantern. "Ye han't seen them steers nowheres, have ye?"

"I've had someth'n' else to think of," replied Dickson, savagely.

"Glad to hear it," remarked the farmer. "It's Sunday mornin', an' we'd ought all on us to be thinkin' o' suthin' else. But you had sich a chance to look around, up there, I thought you might a' seen 'em, if they was in the woods, or anywheres. Perhaps ye'd like to take one o' these oars, to warm ye?"

Dickson accepted, without comment, and worked his passage. After a long silence, he inquired, in a sinister tone, what value the farmer set upon his real and personal estate.

"D' ye think o' buyin' an' settlin' amongst us?" asked Mr. Jackwood. "Took with our manners an' customs, I s'pose?"

"I only asked for information," sneered Dickson.

"Wal, in that case,—though 't is Sunday,—I han't no objection to sayin' 't the vally I set on my property, live stock, farmin' utensils, an' everything, is seven thousan' dollars, cash on the nail. I don't 'spect to git it right away, but I won't part with an acre for less."

"And suppos'n' you should 'wake up, some fine mornin', and find you had n't no farm, nor no seven thous'n' dollars, neither?"

"Wal, then I should try to git along without 'em, an' be thankful for what I did have."

"I'd advise ye to cultivate that feel'n'," said Dickson, "against the time comes; an' I prophesy 't won't be slow com'n'."

"That's perty talk from a man 't I've invited to breakfast!" returned the farmer. "What d' ye mean?"

"I mean that your farm an't any too big to cover this little business o' yourn, — ye understand?"

"What business?"

"Harborin' that gal, — if ye relish bein' told in so many words. The wuth of a fine, han'some piece o' property, like her, an't less than fifteen hundred, in the first place. She's to be paid for, to begin with. Then, say nothin' 'bout imprisonment, there's fines, I s'pose ye know, that'll whittle what's left o' yer farm down to a mighty small figur'; and if ye stand out about it, the law'll swaller up what's left. I hope that's a consolash'n for the loss o' yer steers."

"It's Sunday," said Mr. Jackwood, in a low, quiet tone, after a thoughtful pause, "an' we won't talk over business, I guess, 'fore to-morrer. But I'll tell ye one thing, — though I set as much by my farm as any man, I would n't mind losin' it in a good cause, if I could be o' sarvice to a feller-critter by so doin', an' save 'em from pirates an' man-stealers, like you. That don't make out, though, 't I had any hand in the business you lay to my charge, as I see. If that 'ere poor young woman is drowned, 't an't on my conscience; an' I defy ye to prove the fust thing!"

"That'll be an easy matter," replied Dickson. "I'm used to these cases."

"Wal, I an't, an' I'm glad on 't!" said Mr. Jackwood. "But le's drop the subject for to-day. We'll go to breakfast; then, if you like, you can ride to meetin' with me. I'm goin' over to the North Village; they've got a famous good minister there, an' I think 't would n't do you no harm to hear him preach."

Arrived at the house, Dickson entered, and warmed himself and dried his clothes by the kitchen fire. His friend Jones, whom he had expected to call for him early that morning, had not yet made his appearance; and he was but too happy to avail himself of the farmer's hospitality.

"I s'pose," said he, "you won't object to lend'n' me a hoss for a couple of hours?"

"I'll give ye yer breakfast, and yer last night's lodgin', too, for that matter, but you'll haf to excuse me if I don't lend the

hoss," replied Mr. Jackwood. "I think too much o' both my ponies for that."

"D'ye fancy 't would n't be safe?" cried Dickson. "I reck'n I'm good for more 'n one hoss."

"Per'aps; but I should want suthin 'sides either yer business or your face to recommend ye, if I was goin' to trust you very fur. Shall we read 'fore breakfast, mother?"

Mrs. Jackwood said she thought it would be as well, as the potatoes were not quite done. The farmer accordingly took down the big Bible from the shelf, and called the children to join in the reading.

"I can't read this morning," articulated Phœbe, whose eyes were red and swollen.

"Very well; we'll excuse ye," replied her father. "But don't cry any more, child; 't won't do no good. You may begin, Bim'lech. If you'd like to look over," — to Mr. Dickson, — "I'd like to have ye. Give him your Testament, Bim'lech."

Dickson declined the offer. But he could not easily avoid hearing a chapter of the glorious Evangel of St. John, and the simple, earnest prayer that followed.

The farmer's voice was tremulous with emotion, and when he prayed that God would soften the hearts of oppressors, and pour out his tender mercies upon all who were oppressed, Phœbe sobbed aloud; and Dickson could see the tears run silently down Mrs. Jackwood's face, as she knelt beside her chair. His heart must have been of flint, not to be touched by the scene. He glanced darkly towards the door, as if anxious to get away; but, with knotted and flushed features, writhing in his chair, he sat and heard the prayer to its close. The ordeal passed, he readily accepted an invitation to breakfast.

"There's somebody come," said Bim, who had gone to the door to give Rover a piece of pork he had abstracted from the platter when his mother's back was turned.

The comer proved to be Jones. Dickson went out to meet him and they talked some time under the stoop.

"Bim'lech," said the farmer, "tell 'em to put their hosses under the shed, an' come in an' have some breakfast."

"I would n't!" exclaimed Bim, vindictively.

"Mind!" said his father, putting down his foot.

The boy, accordingly, although with a bad grace, delivered the message; and, after some hesitation, the men came in. Mrs. Jackwood put on an additional plate, flanked with a knife and fork; and they sat down and ate meat with Christians. When they had made a hasty meal, they arose to go; Dickson offering to pay the farmer. But Mr. Jackwood declined his money.

"Don't you never take pay, when strangers put up with ye?" asked Dickson.

"That's neither here nor there," replied the farmer. "What ye have o' me, I give ye. I neither lend nor sell to sich as you. I've told ye the reason why I won't lend; if ye want to know why I won't sell, it's 'cause your money's arnt in a bad trade, an' I'd ruther have nothin' to do with 't."

"Say, father!" cried Abimelech, after the men were gone, "they can't git yer farm away from ye, can they?"

"You may be sartin," said the farmer, "they will if they can. The law's on their side, too, I s'pose. But I an't goin' to trouble myself 'forehand. I've done my best, 'cordin' as I see the duty sot afore me to do; an', with a clean conscience, I'll wait an' see what comes of it all."

"I would n't let 'em have it!" exclaimed Bim; "I'd sue 'em."

"Bim'lech," returned his father, "I never sued a man in my life, an' I never was sued. But we won't talk about that now. I'm goin' to take your mother over to Mist' Dunbury's, an' goin' from there to meetin'; an' you can go with me, or stay to hum with Phoebe." And he proceeded to lather his face, and to prepare for Mr. Rukely's great sermon. There were no "chores" to attend to; those that Abimelech had left undone having been despatched by the farmer after his return home, while Dickson still kept watch at the stack.

XL.

MR. CRUMLETT'S SPECULATIONS.

MISS MATILDA FOSDICK was not so indifferent to the chances of obtaining a husband, but she entertained a degree of matrimonial hope from the honorable intentions of Mr. Enos Crumlett. Enos had a consumptive mother, whom he "did n't ca'c'late would be with him much longer," and whom he was anxious to replace with a good wife. "I can't think o' lettin' my farm," he reasoned, "an' I s'pose 't 'll be enough on 't cheaper 'n the end to git married, than to hire a housekeeper, or board." He had these considerations in mind when he asked Miss Fosdick for her company; and perhaps Miss Fosdick also had something of the sort in view when she accepted his advances. He wanted a housekeeper; she wanted a house to keep.

It was through Mr. Crumlett's influence that Matilda had consented to step out of her "sphere" into the domestic service of Mrs. Bertha Rukely. Mr. Crumlett reasoned thus: "Tildy I guess 'll make a perty smart kind o' gal, keep her away from 'Livia and 'Patra. Besides, I don't care about marryin' more 'n one o' Sam Fosdick's darters 't a time; an' the sooner she breaks with the rest on 'em, the better. Then, agin, she may as well be arnin' a little suthin for herself, agin spring, for 't an't prob'ble ma 'll hold out much longer 'n that, if she does so long." So Matilda never visited her family now, and had as little intercourse with Olivia and Cleopatra as possible; a circumstance which, in Bertha's mind, very much favored the project of keeping Charlotte's presence in the house a secret. But this advantage found an offset, perhaps, in the fact of Mr. Crumlett's visits. He was accustomed to prosecute his courting in Mr. Rukely's kitchen; and Sunday evening was his regular night.

"Wal," said Enos, pulling off his great-coat, and handing it to Matilda, "how d'e deu these times? What's the news?"

Matilda, hanging the coat upon a nail: "I don't hear much of anything; do you?"

Enos sat down, and stretched out his legs by the stove. "They ben havin' a tearin' time up the crick,—I s'pose you heerd?"

"About Charlotte Woods?"

"Yis; queer, an't it?"

"I wan't much surprised," said Matilda, carelessly.

"Wal, I was!" exclaimed Mr. Crumlett. "I knowed her like a book! She wan't half so black as some white folks 't I know; she was jest dark enough to be ra'al perty."

"You fancy dark complexions, I see!" observed Matilda, with a toss of her head. "I admire your taste!"

"Of course I do," — Enos grinned, — "and that's what makes me like you."

Matilda, scornfully: "You don't call me dark, I hope?"

"I don't call you nothin' else!"

"Well, if you han't got eyes! It's the first time I was ever called dark."

"You're darker 'n Charlotte Woods,—now, come!" cried Enos, hitching towards Miss Fosdick's chair.

"I?" exclaimed Matilda. "Maybe I be," — with sarcasm; "you're welcome to think so, any way! As if I cared!"

"I don't mean," — Mr. Crumlett saw fit to qualify his assertion, — "that is, I did n't say 't your skin is like hern —"

"Which you admired so much!" sneered Matilda.

"You an't exactly dark, but — wal, I can't express it; only you are red, — no, not red, but kind o' red and brown," said Mr. Crumlett.

Matilda puckered her lips into a smirk, accompanied by peculiar undulations of the head, indicative of contempt, and, taking up a book, pretended to read. Mr. Crumlett hitched his chair still nearer, and looked over the corner of the book, with a good-natured grin. "I wish you 'd go away!" exclaimed Matilda.

"There!" said Mr. Crumlett; "that's all I wanted! If

you've got sich a temper 't we can't git along together 'fore we're married, what 'u'd we do afterwards? We may as well break off now as any time." And Enos snatched his coat from the nail.

"You're as much mistaken as you can be, if you think I was mad!" remarked Matilda. "But, if you want to go, I'm sure I shan't hender you." And she kindly offered, as usual, to help Enos "on" with his great-coat.

"Thank ye," said Enos; "much obleeged." He began to button himself up very fast, and put on his mittens. "I'm glad you're so willin' to have me go. Where's my cap?"

"Of course I'm willing, if you've got sick of me, and want to break off the engagement!"

"Who said I was sick, and wanted to break off?"

"You would n't quit so, if you wan't!" said Matilda, beginning to cry. "It's you that's got temper, I should think!"

"I? I han't got the least grain o' temper in the world! Look here! I guess we'll talk that over!"

And Mr. Crumlett pulled off a mitten. "Set down, won't ye, while you stay?" asked the weeping Matilda.

"No, I won't set down." Mr. Crumlett pulled off the other mitten, and placed both in his cap. "What do ye mean about my havin' temper?"

"I meant if you went off so, jest for what I said —"

Mr. Crumlett placed his hat on the table, and sat down, still buttoned to the throat. "We may as well have it understood, and part friends, for what I see. I'm sure I han't thought o' breakin' off; I was goin' 'cause you wanted me to."

"Take off your coat, won't ye?"

"No, I guess not." — Mr. Crumlett looked injured. "I'll unbutton it, though, while I stop."

"You won't feel it when you go out," said Matilda, with tearful affection. "You'd better take it off."

"You beat all the gals I ever see!" exclaimed Enos. "You can make a feller do jest what you're a mind to! — Here it goes!" The coat was returned to the nail in the wall, and Mr. Crumlett seated himself, all smiles, by Matilda's side.

"I did n't know you was so well acquainted with her," said Matilda.

"O, I was n't much! Who said I was?"

"You; you said you knew her like a book."

"Did I? O, wal, all I meant was, that I 'd seen her, and eat dinner with her. You know all about that. 'T was the day her and Hector broke down, and I carried 'em home in my wagon. I made fifty cents by it, — that's the most I remember. And that reminds me 't I made fifty cents to-day, if 't is Sunday."

"How?" asked Matilda.

"Mr. Jackwood found a couple o' his lambs on a knoll jest above the turnpike bridge; and he told me, if I 'd git 'em up to my house, and keep 'em till to-morrer, he 'd gi' me half a dollar. I han't got my money yit; but I shall make sure on 't, when he takes the lambs away. I 'd trust him sooner 'n 'most any man I know, any other time."

"Why not now?"

"Gracious!" said Mr. Crumlett, "han't you heard, then? All the talk is, 't he 'll lose his farm, sartin 's the world. The slave-hunters are stoppin' in Huntersford a pu'pose to prosecute him."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Matilda.

"Does seem kind o' tough. But, then, if I owned a slave, and should lose 'em in that kind o' way, I should think 't wan't no more 'n right I should git my pay for 'em. But, arter all, I 'd go agin finin' a man like Mr. Jackwood a cent more 'n the actual damage. Hang it all!" exclaimed Mr. Crumlett, "I don't know but I 'd done as much for Charlotte Woods, myself! What do ye look so for?"

"So? How?" asked Matilda, innocently.

"Kind o' so," replied Mr. Crumlett, with a grimace, "jest as if you knowed suthin 't you would n't tell."

"I? What do you mean?"

"You 'd make a feller think you 'd heard suthin about Mr. Jackwood, or Charlotte; for as often as I 've spoke of 'em, you 've done *that*," — another grimace.

Matilda put her handkerchief to her face, and chuckled behind it, much to Mr. Crumlett's annoyance. "Wal, I an't goin' to tease," said Enos. — "Folks to hum to-night?"

"I 'm to home," answered Matilda.

"There 't is agin! — Is anybody else?"

"You know Mr. Rukely never is to home Sunday nights; he lectures in the vestry."

"Is Berthy to hum, then?" demanded Enos, impatiently.

"What difference does 't make to you whether she's to home or not?" retorted Matilda, with the same exasperating look.

Thereupon Mr. Crumlett, notwithstanding his total lack of temper, took offence, and, after some more words, went so far as to put on his great coat and mittens again, and button himself to the chin. This time he pulled his cap over his ears, with a resolute air, that frightened Matilda. He utterly refused to stay, except on one condition; and seized hold of the door-latch, as if unwilling to wait even for that. "Jest as you please," he mumbled. "Tell me or not, — I don't care!"

It is probable that Matilda intended to tell him, from the first; for it would have cost her more forbearance than she ever exercised in her life to keep so exciting a secret. His threat of leaving her was enough to quiet her conscience; and, prevailing upon Enos to sit down, she yielded, after a brief struggle, and with an air of profound mystery imparted the story of Charlotte's safety. "But she's real sick!" continued Matilda. "She don't know anything, but talks such unheard-of things! Berthy is with her every minute o' the time; and they've had the doctor to her twice to-day. Don't you whisper it, for the world! I don't want even Berthy should know I told ye, for I promised I would n't!"

"In this very house!" ejaculated Enos, crossing his legs, first one way, then the other, then getting up, then sitting down again, then embracing his knees with his arms, as if to hold himself together. "Beats everything! What 'u'd them Southe'ners give? Jingoos! 'Tilda! it's the greatest thing I ever heard, in all my born days!"

"Hark!" whispered Matilda. "Berthy's coming!"

Dickson and his companions fortified themselves in the village tavern, and appeared to take a brute pride in braving an outraged public. With law, pistols, and the rum-drinking community, on their side, they apprehended little personal danger, as long there

was no occasion for the active performance of their Union-saving functions. Whether they were waiting to receive instructions with regard to the prosecution of Mr. Jackwood, or whether they still entertained hopes of hearing from Charlotte, could only be surmised. Perhaps they had both objects in view. They were also very active in procuring information with regard to colored people, both in the States and in Canada, evidently with the design of seizing some fugitive supposed to have taken refuge in that region.

One day, as Dickson was riding over the turnpike, he was accosted by a person passing in the same direction on foot. "Ye look kind o' lonesome, ridin' alone; p'raps ye would n't mind givin' me a lift as fur as the Corners."

"Jump aboard," replied Dickson.

"The turnpike don't look much as it did about a week ago," observed the chance passenger, as he pulled the blanket over his knees. "Though p'raps you wan't in these parts at the time," — with a glance at Dickson's face. "The water was up to a hoss's knees all along this road, and a good deal deeper in places. But it fell 'bout as sudden as it riz. It had n't more 'n time to freeze over, 'fore down it went, and there wan't nothin' but a scum of ice left on the interval. Then the snow come; and now ye would n't know there 'd been a freshet at all. Do you belong in these parts?"

"I 've been stoppin' a few days down here," replied Dickson.

"Bizness, I s'pose?"

"Wal, business and pleasure combined. I wanted to see what kind o' stuff you Yankees was made of," — with a grin of insolent good-nature.

"You 're from the South, I take it?"

"Wal, I be! The people in these diggin's have pooty generally found that out, I reckon!"

Mr. Crumlett — for the passenger was no other than our friend Enos — felt a good deal excited, and his teeth began to chatter. — "I guess likely ye remember the freshet, then!"

"Wal, I reckon! Some things 't an't so easy to rub out!" said Dickson, whipping his horse.

"'T was dre'ful unfort'nit 'bout her gittin' drowned!" observed Mr. Crumlett, in a friendly tone.

"I would n't have had it happen," cried Dickson, "for twice the wuth of her! that's a fact! But 't an't all over with!"

"How do ye git along with Mr. Jackwood?"

"O, we're gitt'n' along! Things is work'n'!"

"I s'pose there an't no doubt," said Enos, "'bout her bein' drowned — hey? You give it up as a gone case, I s'pose?"

"It's mighty doubtful 'bout our ever hearin' of her agin, I reck'n," replied Dickson.

"Arter all," remarked Mr. Crumlett, "'t would n't be nothin' so very strange, if she was hid away some'eres right in the neighborhood. 'T an't 't all likely, I know; but s'posin' she was?"

"'T an't a supposable case, hardly; and if she was, the next thing 'u'd be to git a clue of her. Gi' me a clue," said Dickson, with professional assurance, "and 't an't easy to trip me up! The gal never 'd got away as she did, if I could have had my way."

Mr. Crumlett chuckled nervously. "Wal, there an't no use talkin', if she's drowned, — but if she only *was* hid away some'eres, 't would n't be a bad joke, hey? You 'd be tickled, I guess!"

"Wal, I should, — particularly if I got suspicions of it in time!"

"Can't help laffin'!" chuckled Mr. Crumlett; "but, arter all, it's no use; there an't a doubt but that she's drowned; you really think there an't, I s'pose?"

"I 'd give," said Dickson, casting a shrewd glance at his companion, — "I 'd give a hundred dollars, out o' my own pocket, jest to have sech a clue as I spoke of."

"A hundred dollars!" echoed Enos, quickly. "You would n't give *me* a hundred dollars, now, — jest s'pose, for instance —"

"I tell you what I *would* do," exclaimed Dickson, "jest for the sake o' talk'n'. I 'd give fifty dollars, cash down, and fifty more in case the gal was found. That 'u'd be fair enough, would n't it?"

'Wal, yis, I s'pose so," said Mr. Crumlett, taken with a gen-

eral shivering. "But, since she's drowned, there an't no use talkin'. We're havin' a fine spell o' weather now."

"I can fancy your call'n' it fine," returned Dickson. "But I've had enough of your Varmount winters."

"It's warmer where you be, hey? Do ye 'xpect to stop long in these parts?"

"That depends altogether upon circumstances. If I could lay hands on that gal —"

"Ha! ha! it makes me laf!" said Mr. Crumlett. "What if I could find out suthin about her? — though 't an't possible, of course!"

"Hold them 'ar lines a minute, if you please." Enos took the reins, and his companion, pulling off his driving-gloves, brought up from the depths of his pocket a handful of gold. "Three — six — nine, — there's twelve half-eagles; that makes sixty dollars; I'll give that to any man for a sure clue to that gal's whereabouts, if she's livin', and in the States; and as much more if she's found, in consequence. Now, thar's a chance for a speculation."

"So there is, — or, ruther, would be," — Mr. Crumlett's teeth chattered harder than ever, — "but what's the use?"

"That's gold," said Dickson, clinking the coin. "Sixty dollars, — twice sixty is a hundred and forty —"

"A hundred and twenty!" interrupted Mr. Crumlett.

"Wal, we'll call it a hundred and forty, for the sake of talk; sixty down, and eighty on condish'n."

"What do ye s'pose 'u'd be done with her, if she should be found?" chattered Mr. Crumlett.

"Why," said Dickson, "she's got friends up here, I reck'n. They'd buy her, ruther 'n see her go South agin, would n't they? All the owner wants is the wuth of his property."

"That's nat'ral!" said Mr. Crumlett.

"And, under the circumstances, he'd put her 't a low figur'. O," cried Dickson cracking his whip, carelessly, "I'd be responsible there should n't be no trouble about that."

"Do ye think so? are ye sure?" demanded Mr. Crumlett
"Hold on; I got to git out here."

‘I’m sorry; I was in hopes o’ havin’ your company cl’ar to the village. Won’t ye go no further?’

“Can’t very well,—should like to, but I got an arrant over here.—Look here!” cried Mr. Crumlett—how his teeth did chatter!—“but never mind! I couldn’t find out nothin’, if I should try. So, ’t an’t no use talkin’. Though, by gracious! I’m a good mind to inquire ’round! You won’t be drivin’ this way to-morrer ’bout this time, will ye?”

“I don’t know but I shall,” returned Dickson; “why?”

“Wal, nothin’,” said Enos. “But, then, if you’re goin’ by,—wal, I don’t know, if you should turn into that ’ere road you passed jest t’ other side o’ the secont house over the crick, per’aps you’d find me choppin’ on the edge o’ the woods. I don’t ’xpect to find out anything; but, if I should,”—chatter, chatter! shiver, shiver!—“wal, on the hull, I guess ’t won’t be wuth while to think about it!”

“I’ll make it wuth yer while!” And Dickson, giving Mr. Crumlett’s hand a hearty shake, left a piece of money in it. “That’s to pay ye for your trouble, any way. Come, ride over to the tavern, and take suthin’!”

“Can’t possibly!” said Enos, getting out of the sleigh.

“Wal, see ye to-morrer!” exclaimed Dickson, confidentially. “Make it all right, ye know! Take care o’ yerself, old boy!” He drove away. Poor Crumlett! how he did shiver, as he gazed after him! He could n’t tell why he shivered,—the day was not extremely cold,—and now he discovered that the perspiration was starting from every pore of his skin.

“A HUNDRED AND FORTY DOLLARS!”—Chatter, chatter! shiver, shiver! again; and Mr. Crumlett wiped the cold sweat-drops from his face. He thought he was going to have a “shake of the ager;” but it was worse than that: he had caught the worst kind of yellow fever, from the sight of Dickson’s gold.

XLI.

CONFESSIONS.

CHARLOTTE raised her head feebly from the pillow, with a troubled expression ; but, perceiving Bertha, who sat watching by the bedside, a faint, grateful smile stole over her wan features.

“ O,” said she, with deep emotion, “ you are always watching ! Good Bertha ! dear Bertha ! I should have died but for you ! I have been very sick, have I not ? ”

“ Very sick,” replied Bertha, taking the poor girl’s hands in hers. “ O, I am so thankful to see you better now ! ”

“ I am afraid my mind is not quite right, as yet,” Charlotte said. “ Every noise startles me. I thought, just now, some persons I feared were rushing into the room.”

“ It was grandmother, who looked in, to ask how you were.”

“ And Hector ? ” said Charlotte. “ Something has happened to him ! God help me, if he does not come soon ! I am still hunted ; and I lie here sick, while I should be hastening to a place of safety ! But I will not repine. — Tell me, Bertha ! did I talk much in my fever ? ”

“ A good deal, at times,” said Bertha.

“ Will you tell me all I said ? ”

“ I did not try to remember anything, because you were delirious.”

“ I wish you would tell me ! ” said Charlotte, with a troubled smile.

Bertha drew near ; her cheeks changed their color, and her lips quivered ; but, bending affectionately over the pillow, she whispered something which made the sufferer start and clasp her hand upon her heart.

"It is true, Bertha!" faltered Charlotte.

"You are his wife!" said Bertha; and her features seemed transfixed with pain.

"You are not glad to hear it!" said Charlotte, sadly. "You think that one in my position—— But, believe me, Bertha, it was his LOVE! Perhaps I should not have yielded. I know I have destroyed the peace and the pride of his family, — but, O, Bertha, do not you hate me for it! do not! You are happy; you are united to the man you love; and I am glad for you! And you — in your place — do not judge me harshly, — do not, good Bertha!"

"O, Charlotte!" Bertha cried out; "if you could look into my heart! You have not understood me! And I have not understood myself till now!"

"You know me now, what I am," said Charlotte. "If you still love me and trust me, why not open our hearts to each other? I will show you all of mine——"

"But mine!" exclaimed Bertha, — "O, what a wayward thing it is! You would hate me, Charlotte!"

"Hate you, dearest Bertha!"

"Yes, — for just now I hated you; I had something like death for you in my soul! You did not know — that I — that I — loved Hector!"

"Bertha! Bertha!" moaned Charlotte.

"What frenzy has forced me to tell you?" cried Bertha. "But you will not hate me; you will not betray me! I must confess myself to you, or the weight that is on my soul will kill me! I love my husband; — for he is good, and how could I not love him? — but not as a wife should love a husband! I never did! I believed, I hoped I should, when we were married. But I shrink from his near approach. I am repelled from him by every instinct and feeling of my nature. Charlotte, tell me what to do!"

Charlotte, in her amazement and pity, could not utter a word.

"I am no longer jealous," Bertha went on. "I felt but one sharp, piercing pang, when you told me you were Hector's wife. I gave him up long ago; I have schooled myself to resignation; I pray for his happiness and yours, from the depths of my heart."

"I know you do!" said Charlotte. "O, Bertha! poor, dear Bertha! what can I do for you?—Do not sob so."

"I will not," returned Bertha, struggling with herself. "I have no right to lay my burdens upon you. Yet I needed to confess myself to some one."

"And you deemed me worthy." Bertha kissed her friend. "O, sister!" breathed Charlotte, "your lot is hard! But duty will sustain you, and prayer will make you strong."

"I do not know," exclaimed Bertha, wildly. "I thought I did my duty when I married. I see now how it was. I silenced my nature; I stifled my deepest convictions; I followed the dictates of calculation. But I thought I was doing right. And, if I could then be so deceived, how can I ever be sure of the truth? I dare not even pray! In the very act horrible promptings come to me. It is as if Satan mocked me!"

"Perhaps," said Charlotte, "this is the punishment for disobeying your deepest convictions. The Spirit has been grieved away. But seek it again, and it will come; it will teach you what to do."

"You comfort me, Charlotte! But, O, the fatal error!—I had not the heroism to live an old maid; that is it! Mr. Rukely was good—he was a minister—I desired a home, and a position. And, as I could not have the one I loved, I flattered myself I ought to marry him. I called esteem and friendship love; I made expediency appear a duty. Do not think I have been disappointed in my husband. He is all I expected, and more; he is too good to me. Only—we do not belong to each other. And, Charlotte, was it not a great sin?"

Charlotte shuddered involuntarily. A long silence followed. "You have something to say to me of yourself," uttered Bertha, at length.

"Yes; but I am too weak now. To-morrow, if I am stronger—"

"To-morrow, then, dear Charlotte!—I will wait. We will both be stronger then." And Bertha embraced her friend, holding her long in her arms, and kissing her fervently.

On the following day, Bertha, having an hour's leisure, came

in and sat down by the convalescent's side. "You were to tell me something," she said.

"Yes, dear Bertha. But sit nearer. I want your hand in mine."

Having raised her friend to an easy position, and braced her up with pillows, Bertha sat upon the side of the bed, holding her hand, and supporting her in a half-embrace.

"It is the story of my life, Bertha. Camille is the name my father gave me. He was a French merchant, named Antoine Delisard. In his youth he had been attached to a young girl,—my namesake; but both were poor, and, on a visit to Louisiana, he became acquainted with a lady whose wealth and accomplishments fascinated him, and they were married. It was an unhappy union. She proved a cold and heartless woman, with nothing in her nature to compensate him for the sacrifice of poor Camille. A separation took place; and he was about returning to France, when, by chance, he saw my mother. She belonged to a bankrupt estate; she was to be sold; and he purchased her. She was then seventeen. I think she was beautiful. She was the child of a white father, and of a mother scarce darker than himself. She was not wanting in education and accomplishments. Brought up in her father's family, she had received the same advantages with his legitimate children. My father loved her; and the difference in their ages did not prevent her returning his attachment with all the fervor of her nature.

"I was their only child. We lived in a pleasant part of the city, where not more than half a dozen friends came to visit my father in the course of the year. He seemed entirely absorbed in his affection for my mother and me. I was his pet. I remember how playfully he used to snatch me up in his arms, when he returned home at night from his work. It was joyful times then! My mother was proud and happy. Sometimes they took me with them into the country; and I recollect that once there was a great storm; the wind broke down trees, and tore them up by the roots, and my father's hat flew away in a cloud of dust. He held me in his arms, to prevent my flying away too. At first I thought it great fun, and clapped my hands; but afterwards I cried with

fright, while my father ran with me across a field, in a high wind, to a house which remains as distinct a picture in my mind as if I had seen it yesterday. A few such incidents form prominent points in my memory of those days; the rest is smooth and quiet.

"When we were alone, my mother used to occupy herself in teaching me to read and write. If I was indolent, she excited my ambition by reminding me of my father, whose praise and encouragement made my little heart beat proudly and happily. I remember his saying to me, one day, 'You will shine with the rest of them, when we go to France.' I was sitting on his knee repeating a lesson my mother had taught me. I looked in his face—I think of it now as such a kind, good face!—and asked what he meant by going to France. 'You will know, one of these days, darling!' said he,—and, kissing me, he took me in his arms and hugged me tight. For a good many days I thought of what he had said. I asked my mother what he meant; she told me that France was a beautiful country away over the sea, and that we were all going there together, as soon as my father was rich enough, so that we could live in grand style, and spend as much money as we pleased. She seemed elated with the idea, and of course I thought it fine; but an old negro servant we had laughed at us, and told us she had heard too many such stories to believe them. That was the first time I ever saw my mother angry. She threatened to have the old woman whipped; but she only laughed the more, showing her hideous gums and broken teeth, which I remember to this day.

"After that we talked a great deal about France. But we were careful not to let the old woman hear us; and, if she entered the room, we were silent. My mother excited my imagination with romantic stories, repeating what my father had told her, with a thousand exaggerations. I thought of nothing, dreamed of nothing, but France. But one day my father came home with a headache, and went to bed. The next I remember, the house was filled with strangers; I was terrified, and my mother was frantic. There was a tall, pale, severe woman, who had her servants and doctors, and who would not let us go into the room where he was. One day, however, my mother armed herself

with a knife, and rushed into the room, dragging me after her. There was a pallor and fury in her looks which frightened the attendants away, and for some time we had sole possession of the chamber. My father called her his brave girl; and, although he was very sick, he pressed us in his arms, declaring that we should not be taken from him again. But suddenly he fell back. My mother screamed. The pale woman rushed in, and we were carried out. I remember my mother clinging to the bed, from which she was torn by main force, struggling and shrieking; then we were locked up in a solitary room. I knew, from her grief and despair, that my father was dead. I had little knowledge, however, of the destiny that awaited us. I cried because he could not go with us to France! I wondered if we should go without him!

"The pale woman was his wife. By law, we were a part of his property, and she and her children were his heirs. Then we learned what it was to be slaves! My mother had almost forgotten; I had never known. I became the companion of slave-children, on a plantation owned by Mrs. Delisard's father. I was half-clad, like them; I ate their coarse food; I slept in their miserable huts."

"And your mother?" said Bertha.

"She was kept as a servant in the house. I did not know, then, how much she was to be pitied. The change in her own condition was not her hardest trial. To see me, her darling growing up with children of an ignorant and degraded class, was more than she could bear. One day Mrs. Delisard brought a lady to visit the plantation. It is one of the most terrible days in my remembrance. I do not know the immediate cause of the outburst; but my mother lost all command of her temper, and poured forth a volley of indignation and anger against her mistress, of which I had a vague consciousness of being in some way the subject. Mrs. Delisard said, 'The child shall be sold!' Her paleness frightened me more than my mother's violence. During the scene, a young man rode up, and, throwing himself from his horse struck my mother with the butt of his riding-whip across the temples. It was Mrs. Delisard's son —"

"Your brother?" ejaculated Bertha.

"I suppose so! — My mother fell to the ground, and was carried away insensible. I never saw her again."

"She died!"

"O, no! she was not so happy! There was a place on the plantation where the worst field-hands were, on extraordinary occasions, confined for bad behavior. It was a wretched, dismal pen, which the superstitious slaves had peopled with imaginary horrors; and to be imprisoned there over night was looked upon as a more dreadful and degrading punishment than whipping. There my mother was shut up, and the great black padlock was put upon the door. I heard Mrs. Delisard say, '*to humiliate her,*' — and for years after I could not hear the word *humiliate*, without associating it with all that was gloomy and terrible."

"How long was she kept there?"

"I do not know. No person was allowed to go near her. The slaves huddled together that night, and told over all the stories which could be remembered or imagined in connection with the jail. There was a tradition of an old negro who died there, one night, years before, in consequence of a cutting-up, or flogging, and whose *ha'nt*, or apparition, was sure to manifest itself whenever there were any troubles on the plantation. One of the storytellers, who had passed a night in the jail, declared that he heard the old negro shelling corn on a shovel until three o'clock in the morning. The rest related similar superstitions, frightening themselves and each other, until they scarcely dared separate for the night. For my part, I was glad to creep into the bunk with the other children, and cover my eyes, for fear of seeing the ghost of the old negro. How I trembled for my mother! I was too terrified even to cry.

"The next morning, after the hands had gone to the field, I was waiting anxiously to know what would be done with my mother, or if she was still alive, when there was an inquiry made for me, and the children whispered that 'Milly was going to be sold!'"

"Who was Milly?" inquired Bertha.

"If you had seen all eyes turned upon me, with shy and wondering looks, you would have discovered who Milly was! That

was the nickname of *Camille*. I was marched out for inspection. The overseer of the plantation turned me around, and made me show my arms and knees to a stranger, who was going to buy me. I remember the man's saying that I looked sickly, and the overseer's saying that it was '*nat'ral white*.' Then they walked away together, to conclude the bargain. I saw the overseer point towards the jail; and it seemed to me that he was explaining why I was to be sold, and telling about my mother. All this time I could say nothing but 'Don't sell me! please don't have me sold!' I was sobbing, when one of the servants came to take me to the piazza, where Mrs. Delisard was walking with her visitor. The lady spoke to me kindly, and asked me how I would like to have her buy me. I said I did not want to be sold. 'But you would rather go with me than with that man, would you not?' said the lady. 'I want to go with my mother,' said I, 'and I do not want to be sold.' Then she said something aside to Mrs. Delisard. I only heard Mrs. Delisard's reply that she was *determined*. I thought it was something awful to be determined; for I was wise enough to see that there was no mercy in her heart for either my mother or me.

"I was sold, and carried away that day. I remember struggling and crying to see my mother again; after which, I can recall nothing, until I found myself in my new home. It was at the house of the lady who had purchased me. She came and asked me how I was, as I lay upon a bed, in a room in which I had awaked without even knowing how I was brought there. I begged to be taken back to my mother. It was not until years after that I heard anything definite with regard to her fate. Then I learned that, on coming out of the jail, she never laughed again, or spoke, unless she was addressed. Her spirit was crushed. She pined away, and her owners tried to sell her; but she had become unfit for any labor; and, in the course of a few months, she died."

"Your own mother!" said Bertha.

"Alas, Bertha!" continued her friend, wiping her tears, "I had already divined her fate. For a long time after I was sold, I felt her spirit crying out for me, and refusing to be comforted

But at length she seemed to come to me; and one night I had such perfect consciousness of her presence, that I firmly believed she had been near. The next night, I felt her presence again. She told me in a dream that she was free, and that she would be with me always, to guard and strengthen me. By degrees the truth revealed itself, and I knew her spirit had attained that freedom which did not exist for her on earth.

“Like Mrs. Delisard, my new mistress was a widow; she was gay and independent; but she had a benevolent heart, and, from the first, she treated me with a great deal of kindness. She was naturally impatient; but, as I became accustomed to her habits and caprices, I could wait upon her and please her better than any one else. I think she had a real affection for me. I could tell you a great many anecdotes about her; but I will relate only one or two, which make points in my own history. As I had much leisure time, I used to amuse myself with reading such books as I could steal from the library and return without danger of discovery. How Mrs. Beman came to suspect the habit, I never knew; but one day she said to me, ‘Milly, can you read?’ ‘I could read a little once,’ I acknowledged, tremblingly. After a few more such questions, which I answered evasively, she said, ‘Take my advice, Milly, and do not read any more. It is a bad practice for girls in your condition. Servants have no business with books. Above all, do not read such stories as the *Bride of the Forest*; they will only serve to put idle fancies into your head, and make you unhappy.’

“The *Bride of the Forest* was the book I had been reading that very day! I said nothing, but went away and cried. That night Mrs. Beman called me to her, after she was in bed. ‘Take this book,’ said she, ‘and show me how well you can read.’ The book was the *Bride of the Forest*! I felt my cheek burn, and my voice trembled as I read. But, after a little stammering, I got on very well. Mrs. Beman praised me. ‘It is quite interesting,’ said she. ‘Continue; but do not try to read so fast.’ I was encouraged. I read chapter after chapter, waiting for her to tell me to stop. At length I glanced furtively from the page, to observe her expression. She was fast asleep. From that time

one of the pleasantest duties I had to perform was to read her to sleep.

“An unfortunate occurrence put an end to this recreation. Mrs. Beman married. She took home a handsome young husband, several years younger than herself. The servants said among themselves that he married her for her property, and she him for his beauty. They liked the change; and not enough could be said in praise of the new master. He was careless, liberal, and indulgent. Everybody was happy but me. I found the coarse society of the servants a poor recompense for the delicious nights I used to spend reading to my mistress.

“But it was not long before I met with another change of fortune. One day, my mistress called me to an account. ‘Milly,’ said she, ‘how do you like Mr. Woodbridge?’ ‘He is a good master,’ said I; ‘all the servants like him.’ ‘He is kind to you, Milly, is he not?’ ‘O, always!’ said I. ‘Indeed,’ said my mistress, ‘he has taken a particular fancy to you, has n’t he?’ I trembled, and blushed, and said I did not know. ‘O,’ said she, laughing, — it was a laugh I did not like, — ‘you know very well whether he fancies you or not. Did he ever kiss you?’ ‘No,’ said I, earnestly, ‘he never did!’ ‘Did he ever try?’ she asked, in a quiet, significant tone, which told me that she knew everything. ‘Be honest, Milly, and tell me the truth.’

“Although I had learned to lie in her service, without doing the least violence to my conscience, I could not compose my face to lie to her. ‘Yes,’ said I, ‘he tried once — in fun.’ — ‘And once afterwards, in earnest — eh, Milly?’ — ‘But I would n’t let him!’ I protested, looking her full in the face. ‘I believe you,’ said my mistress. ‘He is coming,’ she added, starting from her seat. ‘Tell him I am in the garden.’

“She stepped into the alcove, just as Mr. Woodbridge entered the room. ‘Where is your mistress, Milly?’ he asked. ‘I don’t know, sir,’ said I. ‘I reckon she’s in the garden.’ He pulled me by the arm, and tried to make me sit upon his knee. ‘You are the queerest girl that ever was!’ said he. ‘What’s the reason you won’t let me kiss you?’ I told him that he was my mistress’s husband, and that she was very fond of him. ‘And so am

I of her,' said he; 'but that don't hinder my liking a pretty young face like yours, you know. She was young once, but that was a good while ago. Don't tell her I said so, unless you want her to take both our heads off!'

"He was trying to kiss me again, and I was fighting him away, when he suddenly let me go. My mistress was coming out of the alcove. 'That will do, George!' said she, smiling, with her forefinger raised. But her cheek was pale, and there was something bitter and vindictive in her smile. I never saw so blank a face as his! 'You may go, Milly,' — and I ran from the room. Two or three days after, she called me to her, and, talking to me kindly, though not with the frank good-nature with which she used to talk to me, told me she thought it best for me to have another mistress. 'Don't cry, Milly,' said she. 'You are a good girl, and I have found a good mistress for you. It is Mrs. Graves. She has coveted you ever since I told her, long ago, that I had a servant to read me to sleep. Her husband is an old man; and there will be little danger of his liking you too well.'

"All this was some consolation. But I was attached to Mrs. Woodbridge, and could not bear the thought of leaving her. I did not know, until afterwards, how really kind she had been. She had sold me at a sacrifice to Mrs. Graves, in order to secure for me a good mistress; although she might have obtained a much higher price for me, at the hands of speculators."

"How strange it sounds, to hear you speak of being bought and sold!" exclaimed Bertha.

"It sounds strange to me, too, Bertha! All this part of my life seems like a dream, as I look back upon it. Mrs. Graves was very young. She had married when a mere child, to please an ambitious parent; her husband was old and jealous. She had suffered extremely before I saw her; but she had naturally a patient temper, and a spiritual mind; and she found her consolation in the deep realities of a religious life. I never cease to be thankful to the kind Providence that placed me under her influence. As her husband's jealousy shut her out from society, she made a companion and confidant of me; and I grew up with her, much like a younger sister. She first taught me the beauty of

truth ; and her gentle words found always such sweet echoes in my heart, that I asked no greater privilege than to sit at her feet, with tears of tenderness in my eyes, and listen. She used to tell me that nobody in the world knew her, but me. I am sure there was no one else to whom she could talk of that which was nearest her heart. The little society she saw consisted of worldly and superficial people, with whom she could feel no sympathy. Her chief consolation, out of herself, was books, which I used to read to her. But the volumes she chose were different from those I read to Mrs. Beman. She took great delight in the Gospels ; I used often to read a passage, then together we would seek for its interior meaning. O, Bertha ! how wonderful are all those sayings of our Saviour ! I had read them before, without understanding them. To Mrs. Graves I owed the revelation of their spirit. The love, the wisdom, the beauty of that spirit, widened, and deepened, and brightened, day by day, as I studied under her instruction. Next to the Scriptures, there were a few books of essays and philosophy, that gratified her most. Then I read choice volumes of travels, history, poetry, and romance. So three years passed. I was seventeen, when Richard, a nephew of Mr. Graves, came home from Germany, where he had been studying. He visited us often ; and I soon discovered a strong sympathy between him and his youthful aunt. She confessed to him her aspirations and her faith ; and, in return, he imparted to her the results of his philosophical studies, with reminiscences of his foreign tour. He was surprised to find that, with her own intuitive perceptions, she had discerned truths which he had arrived at only with great labor. But, with all his learning, she became his teacher. Like me, he sat at her feet, and listened with tearful eyes. Sometimes she spoke like one inspired, putting all his philosophy aside ; then she would ask his forgiveness, sweetly and humbly, telling him that she knew nothing, and that it was not herself that spoke.

“ I was nearly always witness of their interviews. Sometimes Mr Graves was present ; then his wife would tell me gently that I could retire. If he went away, I was recalled. But this state of things could not continue. One evening, Mr. Graves came

suddenly upon us, when we supposed him fifty miles away. In the morning he had given out word that he was going upon a journey, to be absent a couple of days. He had remained in town to watch. When he entered, Richard was on the floor; Mrs. Graves sat upon an ottoman, holding his head in her lap. The night was warm; the doors were all flung open; there was no light but the glimmer of the moon, which shone through the windows. The old man crept in like a cat. I cannot describe the scene that ensued. Mrs. Graves, in her gentlest tones, called me to witness her innocence. Until that moment, he had not been aware of my presence. I hastened from the obscure corner where I sat; but the sight of me appeared only to enrage him the more. He knew the confidence Mrs. Graves placed in me, and believed me a mere tool, that could be blind, deaf, and dumb, in her service, as occasion required. Richard was driven from the house. He would have set up a defence, but Mrs. Graves requested him to go. She was calm and resigned, and only said, in answer to her husband's charges, that he did his own soul injustice. Her innocence appeared a shield from which his shafts glanced off harmless. Unfortunately, they struck me. Some sacrifice to his rage was necessary. Richard had gone too quietly; his wife was too patient under the stroke. To tear her heart, he resolved that I should go too. This was the third great blow of my life. But it fell more heavily upon me than either my father's death or the separation from my mother, because I was now of an age to appreciate all my loss. Another such mistress did not exist on earth. I was once more a slave. I was young; I was not without some personal attractions; I was at the mercy of whoever might purchase me. Once more I was sold. The affair was concluded before even Mrs. Graves suspected the turn her husband's vengeance had taken. I knew nothing of it until the morning I was carried away. At the announcement of my fate, I fell down in a swoon. Ah, Bertha! I can tell you nothing of the agony of that day!"

"But it is terrible," said Bertha, "to be subject to the caprices of a mean and revengeful old man! His wife, could she do nothing for you?"

“How could she? Although her servant, I was his property. I was torn from her arms, and placed in a close carriage, which bore me away from her forever. My new owner accompanied me. He was a speculator, who had been for a few days at New Orleans transacting business with Mr. Graves. He was taking me to Mobile. I can only describe him as one of those smooth, pleasant men, with something indefinably bad and repulsive in their natures, from which we shrink instinctively. He tried to cheer me, by telling me, gayly, that one good master was worth forty good mistresses, for a handsome young girl like me. We reached Mobile that afternoon. His wife met us, on our arrival. She was a passionate woman, with a certain plumpness and fairness about her, which passed with many for beauty. But she looked anything but beautiful to me then. ‘For heaven’s sake, doctor!’ she cried, ‘what have you got there?’ ‘Only a bit of a speculation,’ said my new master, with a laugh. ‘I bought her for seven hundred,’ he added, in a low tone, ‘and if I don’t get twelve for her within as many days, I’ll give her to you. You shall have that new shawl the day I get her off my hands.’ Ah, Bertha! you never knew what it was to be the property of a base and selfish man! No law to protect me; no friend to whom I could appeal; no chance or hope of escape,—what could I do? He could not comprehend how a person in my condition should resist him; and the longer I evaded his pursuit, the more desperate and determined he became. At length,—it was after the lapse of several months,—there came a change. O, Bertha! if I had the courage to draw the dark picture of those months!—but let them pass!

“Dr. Tanwood was frequently absent, on affairs of business or pleasure; at which times his wife was in the habit of receiving visitors, who rarely came when he was supposed to be at home. I should tell you that, in the mean while, the twelve days having long since elapsed during which I was to have been sold, he had gone through with the mockery of giving me to his wife. She was naturally an extravagant and luxurious woman, and the gratification of having me to dress her, and wait upon her, and fan her as she lolled upon her favorite lounge, had partly reconciled

her to my presence. One day she sent me to say to a visitor, who was waiting in the parlor, that she would be with him in two minutes,— which meant ten. As I entered, he looked at me strangely, as he had often done before,— for he had been frequently at the house,— and as I was retiring, he called me back. I asked him what he would have. ‘You can put away my hat,’ said he. But, as I went to take it, he held it, and looked up in my face. ‘What is your name?’ ‘Camille,’ said I,— ‘people call me Milly.’ ‘Camille,’ said he, ‘I am a northern man. There is something I would say to you, if I dared.’ I was frightened by the wild thoughts that rushed through my brain. ‘You understand me,’ he said. ‘Yes,’ I answered; ‘and you may dare to say anything!’ ‘Can you read?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘And write?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘You have heard of the northern states?’ said he. ‘The free states!’ I answered. ‘Good!’ said he. ‘There is no need of explanations. Go now. I will see you again.’

“I ran back trembling to my mistress. She was dressing, and scolded me for leaving her so long alone. I assisted her, scarce knowing what I did; but I finished the task without exciting her suspicions, and she swept into the parlor. Presently she summoned me, and called for water and glasses. ‘For Mr. Roberts,’ said she, languidly, with a wave of her fan, as I reëntered with a salver. Mr. Roberts took a glass and handed it to her; then taking one for himself, he dropped a little ball of paper upon the salver. You can imagine the eagerness with which I unrolled it, and examined its contents, the moment I was alone. There were four lines, written with a pencil, which I will repeat, if I have not forgotten them :

‘Would ye know how young Ellen deceived the old couple?

In a swate little billet, directed to Pat,

She wrote all her sorrow, her hopes, and her trouble,

And pinned it one night in the crown of his hat.’

“It was not easy to forget those lines, Bertha! I thought I discovered in Mr. Roberts a generous and adventurous spirit, that might be of infinite service, if I would trust him. I stole pencil and paper from the doctor's office, and, carrying them to the gar-

ret, wrote a hurried account of 'poor Ellen,' who, in the despair of her state, was ready to adopt any measures to escape from the tyranny of the aged couple. Had the note actually fallen into my mistress' hands, I doubt if she would have understood it. I think she was not even aware that I could write. But it did not fall into her hands. I secreted it in the lining of the visitor's hat, which I had previously placed upon the hall-table. Thus our correspondence began. When he came again, I found another communication where I had placed mine. It was in rhyme, which he appeared to have a talent for composing; and in it I read, with trembling interest, the assurance that Patrick O'Rooney would devise speedy means for the deliverance of poor Ellen.

"I had now strong hopes of escaping from my precarious situation. It was time. Irritated by my constant evasions, the doctor had threatened to sell me to a coarser and brutal man, whom he brought to the house to intimidate me. 'He has offered a thousand dollars for you,' said he, 'and if I can't tame you, he shall. He has no jealous wife to stand in the way.' The menace served to accelerate the crisis. I found Mr. Roberts resolute and ingenious. Indeed, his extraordinary audacity alarmed me more than once. Sometimes he came twice the same day, bringing me messages in his hat. I wondered how Mrs. Tanwood could avoid seeing that his visits were designed for me; but she was infatuated, and believed that she had charmed him to that point.

"On one occasion, he brought an acquaintance, whom he introduced to Mrs. Tanwood. Ah, Bertha! it is with strange feelings that I recall the incidents of that night! The acquaintance was HECTOR! How well I remembered him, when I saw him for the second time at your house, there on the hill!"

"You had seen him, then!" exclaimed Bertha. "Tell about it!"

"Indeed, there is not much to tell. I was afraid of him, and wished him away. Mr. Roberts had been wise enough not to call his attention to me; it seemed, however, when I met him at your house, that my features were fixed in his memory, and that I could not move or speak without danger of recognition. One incident I thought surely would recur to him, at sight of me.

Mr. Roberts brought me a small bundle that night, which I had taken from his hat, and concealed in a barrel in the garret, during their visit. On going away, Hector observed his friend's hat, and spoke of this package. 'Do you take me for a lackey?' cried Mr. Roberts, with a laugh. 'You certainly had a package,' said Hector, 'for I remarked it both in the street and after we came in.' My mistress called me, to know what I had done with it. I am good for nothing when a sudden shock comes upon me, and coolness and self-possession are required to turn aside suspicion. I trembled, and felt my cheek change color; but before I had time to reply, Mr. Roberts declared that it was a joke of his friend's; and I took advantage of the discussion which ensued, to escape from observation."

"What was the package?" asked Bertha.

"It contained articles destined for my disguise; I had been unable to get them myself, and Mr. Roberts had engaged to procure them for me. I need not tell you with what anxiety I now counted the days, and hours, and minutes. At last, O, Bertha! at last the night of all nights in my life was at hand! There was so much depending upon the secrecy of my movements, and such fatality might topple down, like an avalanche, at the touch of the slightest accident, that I prayed continually for the guidance of a power above my own.

"For some weeks I had been accustomed to make my bed on the kitchen floor with the cook. She was no very pleasant companion; she was decrepit and cross; more than that, she affected to despise and hate me, because I was white. She suspected, however, the reasons why I preferred her company to sleeping in a room alone, and suffered me to occupy a corner of her dormitory. I spread out my bed that night, and, lying down as usual, pretended soon to be fast asleep. She was in a grumbling mood, and talked in her worst style for over an hour; but I made no reply; and at length, becoming weary of her muttered soliloquy she turned over, and became silent. About an hour later, the doctor came home. The clock had just struck twelve. I heard him enter softly, and take off his boots, before going up stairs. He had reasons for not wishing to disturb his wife; and, notwith

standing all that had passed, he still entertained hopes of finding me in the garret. I listened with a beating heart; and, after a long silence, I heard his stealthy steps again on the stairs. He came to the kitchen, and spoke to me. It was dark, and I lay still as death, hoping that he would go away; but there was nothing to prevent his entering the room, and he came in, on tiptoe. My only resource was to rouse old Juno, and I shook her arm; but her sleep was so heavy that I could not awaken her. The doctor attempted to take me from her, and for a week after I carried the mark of his hand upon my arm. The struggle awoke the cook; I was saved. After the doctor was gone, she lay down again in her corner, chuckling at his discomfiture. It was not long before she was again asleep, and all was still in the house. My great fear then was that he would return; I lay listening for hours. At three o'clock, hearing no sound, I got up, and stole softly from the kitchen. His office was on the same floor. His wife's apartments and the parlor were on the floor above. I had to pass these to arrive at the garret; but first I took the precaution to open the street door. After waiting some time to ascertain that no one was disturbed, I ascended the stairs, pausing and listening at every step.

"Well, I reached the garret, and all was still. I then groped my way to the barrel, where I had concealed my disguise, together with a candle, necessary in making my toilet. I struck a light, and proceeded to adjust my costume before a fragment of glass stuck against the wall. I had an old and faded merino dress, which I had arranged for the occasion. The articles Mr. Roberts brought me I had prepared by stealth, and they were all ready to put on. There was a wig of gray hair, and old-fashioned spectacles, with colored glasses; in addition to which, I had an old woman's cap, and a bonnet that shaded my face. The most difficult thing of all was to color my complexion, to give it that wrinkled appearance characteristic of old age. But this I had already done once before, to give Mrs. Graves an evening's entertainment; and had, at that time, succeeded so well, even in deceiving the members of the house, that I felt confidence in adopting the disguise for a more serious adventure.

“At length all was arranged ; and, looking in the glass, I was half frightened at the image that met my view. It was no longer myself, but a veritable old woman. So far, all was well ; but, O, Bertha, so much yet remained to be done ! I had first to descend the stairs, with a small bundle of clothes in one hand, and my shoes in the other, pausing and listening at every step, as before. But I will not dwell upon that ; you can imagine my feelings, at such a time. I succeeded in passing the hall, — then how glad I was that I had taken the precaution to leave the door ajar ! I glided into the street, and put on my shoes. The city lay around me, like a wilderness, so silent and deserted that the sound of my own footsteps startled me. The stars were just beginning to wane before the light of day. On the corner, where I expected to meet my friend and guide, I encountered three or four intoxicated men, who accosted me, and refused to let me pass, until I had answered their tipsy questions. I dared not cry for help ; for I knew not which most to fear, them, or the city watchmen. Fortunately, at this crisis, Mr. Roberts appeared, and rescued me from their hands. I got away, and hastened along the street. In a little while he rejoined me ; then first I felt that I was safe ; but he had bad news to tell me, which left me little time to rejoice. He had engaged the captain of a merchant ship, whom he had interested in my behalf, to carry me to New York. His vessel lay down the bay, and he was to send a boat at daybreak, to take me on board. The evening previous, however, he had sent word, at a late hour, that the day of sailing was postponed, — which Mr. Roberts had not received in season to communicate to me. But he told me not to be discouraged. ‘Of course,’ said he, ‘you are not anxious to go back.’ Go back ! I did not know what would tempt me to go through again what I had that night suffered ! ‘Well,’ said he, ‘the sooner you are out of the city, the better. There are oyster-boats going down the river at all hours of the morning, and I see no reason why one of them cannot be engaged to put you on board the Manhattan.’ We reached the river, and, walking along the wharves, found two men preparing to push off. My companion addressed them ; but he did not like their appearance ; and, for my part, I was afraid to trust myself alone in their charge.”

"Mr. Roberts was not going with you, then?" said Bertha.

"O, no; — but I will tell you about that. Near by, we saw an old man and a boy, also on the point of setting out for the oyster-banks; and Mr. Roberts proceeded to make a bargain for my passage. 'She is a poor old woman,' said he, 'whose son has run away, and she wants to catch him before he sails.' — The regret, anxiety, joy, — O, Bertha! you can imagine what I felt as I took leave of him, and stepped into the boat. He remained standing upon the wharf; the old man pushed off; a light wind filled the sail, and in a few moments the only friend I then had in the wide world was lost to sight.

"The sun was near two hours' high when we approached the Fleet, as it is called; and the old man pointed out to me the Manhattan, riding at anchor in the bay. We had a good breeze; and in a little while we sailed alongside. My heart stood still when the old man hailed for the captain. The reply came that he was ashore, and would not come on board until ten o'clock. I was greatly alarmed at this; but, fortunately, I was recognized by the mate, who was in the secret, and received on board. The old man and his son were sent away, and I was conducted to the state-room secured for me. O, when the door was shut, and I was alone, — and safe, — O, Bertha, how my full heart overflowed in prayers and tears! I lay down in my berth; and I was so exhausted and weary that I soon fell asleep. A rap at my door awakened me. I was foolish enough to be frightened, imagining that my master had come; but presently I summoned courage, and turned back the bolt. A bronzed, bright, benevolent face looked in upon me; it was the captain, whom I knew at once as a friend. He assured me that the vessel would sail on the following day, and, on hearing my story, offered to bet heavy sums that nobody would think of looking for me on board his ship.

"I was more grateful than my words could express. The day and night dragged slowly, but, O, I was patient, Bertha, and my heart was full of a new joy. I was free! At last the time of sailing arrived; what, then, was my surprise, on receiving a visit from Mr. Roberts! I was still more surprised to learn that he had come on board with his baggage, resolved upon making the

voyage with me! Then, Bertha, I began to have a clearer insight into the heart of that man. He had intended going with me, from the first."

"Why had he deceived you?"

"Before my escape, he had expressed, in one of his notes, sentiments which I disliked; and I had replied that if such were his motives in assisting me, I must decline those services which I could not repay in the manner he seemed to anticipate. He was not a man I could ever regard otherwise than as a friend, and I told him so. He denied the motives I imputed to him; but, Bertha, when we met on board the ship, I could no longer shut my ears against a truth which had been whispered to me continually. I had charged my heart with ingratitude and injustice, and refused to believe what it said. Now, however, it was but too plainly revealed. Selfishness was the mainspring of his conduct, and all that he had done for me was marred.

"Once at sea, I abandoned my disguise, and often appeared upon deck with no other attempt at concealment than a simple veil thrown over my face. When off the coast of Florida, we had fine breezes, the sea was surpassingly beautiful, and the sky was of a clear, deep, heavenly blue, which filled my soul with wonder and joy. There was but one cloud above my horizon. It appeared in the form of Mr. Roberts. One day, to escape him, I retreated to my room; but he followed me, and, by an unworthy stratagem, succeeded in gaining admittance. We were the only passengers, and the sole occupants of the cabin at the time; and I was in his power. As an excuse for his violence, he had the baseness to remind me of what I owed to him, and to charge me with ingratitude. 'It is true,' said I, 'I owe you my liberty, and in return I will give you my life.' — I said this despairingly, for I was ready to die. He declared impetuously that I was wrong to speak so; for it was only my love he sought. 'But,' said I, 'your approach will kill me! I give you that warning.'

"I no longer held him from me; but, as he caught me in his arms, he felt a hard substance strike him. Starting aside, he caught the glimpse of a knife-handle, and thought I had stabbed

him ; but, as he released me, I fell back ; and then he saw that the blade was in my own breast."

" You had stabbed yourself ! "

" No, Bertha. But I had placed the knife between us. It was one I had borrowed of the captain on some pretence ; the blade was broad and sharp ; but, fortunately, the point had become entangled in my handkerchief, in which I held it concealed. I suffered from a deathly faintness ; but I did not quite lose my consciousness at any moment : I placed my handkerchief upon the wound, to stop the blood, and entreated Mr. Roberts, with all my remaining force, to have mercy upon me, and leave me. Overcome with horror and remorse, he fell upon his knees, and prayed to be forgiven, and to be permitted to atone for his wrong. He hastened to bring me linen from his trunk ; but I locked the door, and would not let him return. Afterwards, when I was stronger, I washed and dressed the wound myself, and left nature to do the rest. I appealed to the captain for protection, and found in him a genuine, hearty friend. As the voyage approached its termination, he asked me what I proposed to do on my arrival at New York. I showed him a letter which Mr. Roberts had previously given me to a person in that city, who, he said, would assist me in reaching Canada. ' But, since he is with me,' said I, ' I no longer know what to do.'

" How well he managed, you will know, when I tell you that, on arriving at New York, I was taken secretly from his ship, at night, and placed on board a sloop, bound up the North River. He had, by chance, met a skipper of his acquaintance, who was to sail with the first wind, and who promised to land me in Albany, free of expense. How fortune seemed to favor me, Bertha ! I was on my way to Canada, before Mr. Roberts knew I had left the ship.

" As I was travelling alone, I had followed Captain Damon's prudent counsel, and resumed my disguise. ' An old woman,' he said, ' will get along much better among a certain class of people than a young girl.' I had had experience enough to believe him. He put into my hands a letter for a brother of his at Whitehall, which he said was directly on my route, assuring me that, on its

delivery, I would find a friend to forward me safely upon my journey. Two days after quitting the Manhattan, I was landed at Albany, as the skipper had promised. But he did not leave me until he had placed me on board a boat bound for Whitehall, and made a bargain for my passage, which I paid with money Captain Damon had given me for the purpose. Thus far I had played my part so well that no person, not even the skipper, suspected that my age was less than three score."

"I cannot conceive how you could do it!" said Bertha.

"It was not so difficult as you imagine. People do not scrutinize old women. I pretended to have a catarrh, which obliged me to wear my bonnet; then I dressed to disguise my form, and wore old gloves upon my hands. I experienced more difficulty in managing the tones of my voice than in all the rest. But I have a respectable talent at mimicry, and succeeded even in that; although, I fancy, people must have thought me exceedingly quiet for an old lady. Few, I think, ever felt less ambition to talk!

"Everything happened favorably until my arrival at Whitehall, when, to my consternation, I learned that Captain Damon's brother had removed into the country, on account of ill-health. As I had no means of getting to Canada without assistance, I obtained his address, and set out on foot, the same evening, to find him.

"I had not gone far before I ascertained that the distance was much greater than I had suspected. I walked four miles that night, and stopped to rest at a farm-house. I was allowed to sleep in the barn, and invited to breakfast on the following morning. I had no appetite; but, to guard against future hunger, I forced myself to eat a morsel, and, thanking them hastily, took my leave. This house proved to be that of Mr. Jackwood's brother-in-law, in Sawney Hook; it was there I first made the acquaintance of grandmother Rigglesly.

"I was now among the mountains, in the midst of new and surprising scenery. I walked far, in the cool of the day; when I became tired, I sat down on the roadside, and listened to the singing of the birds. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed that morning! Hope and freedom inspired me; but hope and free-

dom did not prevent my becoming faint and weary, long before noon. But, as I was fast approaching the house I was in search of, I kept on, and arrived in sight of it at about one o'clock. I was alarmed to find a number of carriages at the fence, and a group of solemn people near the door. Presently a coffin was brought out, and placed in a wagon; then the people began to get into their carriages, and a procession was formed.

"I sat down upon a stone by the road, and waited for the funeral to pass. Presently two men came out on foot, and stopped to talk near the place where I sat. I inquired if that was Mr. Damon's house.

" 'That was Charles Damon's house,' one of them replied, 'but he has moved.' I was so disturbed at this that I could scarcely speak, to ask where he had gone. 'He has just gone down the road,' the man said. 'You will find his new house in the graveyard just over the hill. It is a house of but one story, and that is built under ground.'

"I was trying to collect my thoughts, and wondering what I should do, when the men began to discuss an item of news which frightened me so much that I quite forgot the funeral. They spoke of the fugitive-slave law, and of some slave-hunters, who, as I understood them, had recently arrived in town. 'For my part,' said one, 'I hope they will put the law in force, and carry back every fugitive this side of Canada. I'll help them, if I'm called upon.' I waited until the men went away; then, rising to my feet, set out to walk as fast as I could down the road. I afterwards learned that the slave-hunters alluded to were probably some who about that time visited a town in the State of New York; but, in my panic, I imagined them in full pursuit of me. I took by-roads, and travelled on and on, keeping a northerly direction, but with no definite purpose in view, until I found myself on a wild mountain-side, and the path I had followed became lost in a gloomy forest. My courage failed. I had eaten nothing since morning, and there was danger of perishing in the woods. But, looking off upon the valley, I saw houses and farms, and, weary as I was, I began to descend the mountain. I crossed a steep pasture-land, full of rocks and thistles, among which I

slipped and fell, until I was so overcome with pain and exhaustion that sometimes I could scarce rise again to my feet. But the valley lay before, and it seemed to me that on reaching the meadows I would find less difficulty in proceeding, they looked so smooth, and green, and cool! I drank at a clear brook, that leaped plashing and singing along the mountain-side; and, feeling slightly rested and refreshed, kept on down the slope. On reaching the low land, however, I found the grass an unexpected obstacle; and as I proceeded it became ranker, deeper, and thicker, at every step, until I sank down in utter helplessness and despair. But night was setting in, a storm was gathering and blackening, and I made a final effort to reach an old barn that stood not far off in the valley. I came to a stream hedged with willows and vines, and, as I was searching for an opening in the bushes, I discovered a bridge. I had hardly crossed, when a dizziness seized me, and I fainted, within a dozen yards of the barn. On recovering my consciousness, I heard a shout, and exerted myself to answer it. It was Mr. Jackwood calling Abimelech, who was lost in the meadow.

"I feel too weak, Bertha," said Camille, for so we now must call her, "to tell you more to-day. I have made a long and tedious story. But another time you shall hear more of Mr Roberts —"

"And Hector," said Bertha, — "how were you married? He had left you once!"

"Yes, when I told him my history. But his love," said Camille, with a glorious smile, "his love was great as his soul! He came back, and claimed me as his wife."

Bertha covered her face. "Happy, happy wife! God bless you!" and she sobbed upon Camille's bosom.

XLII.

THE WILDERNESS.

I KNOW not what discontent gnawed Mr. Dunbury's heart. If the same that tortured him during his illness, and before the loss of Camille, it had since become intensified to an insupportable degree. By day his brow lowered with fiercest gloom. By night he groaned and gnashed his teeth in sleep. "O, God! O, God! O, God!" he would sometimes cry out, in his anguish. His invalid wife was witness to these outbursts. Although lying almost at the brink of the grave, — although her soul, hovering 'twixt life and death, seemed only to linger that it might pray for those she loved until the end, — her heart was moved with compassion for her husband; and, to quench the fires of his remorse, to soothe and soften him, she would have imparted to him the secret of Camille's rescue. But only once had she the power to approach the subject — to mention Camille's name. He tore himself fiercely from her. "Away!" he cried. "The fires of hell are in me!"

One day he heard the vague rumor of a drowned body being discovered, some miles below, at a place that had been flooded by the recent freshet. Although scarce able as yet to ride, he mounted his horse, and spurred with speed to the scene of the excitement. The rumor proved well-founded. A frozen corpse had been brought in from the interval. But it was the corpse of a man. Mr. Dunbury recognized the lunatic, Edward Longman.

The friends of the deceased were advised of the event. Mr. Longman and his daughter-in-law came from Canada; and the funeral was attended in Mr. Dunbury's house.

In the midst of the ceremony, a rider arrived upon a reeking and foaming horse, and, flinging himself down at the gate, appeared abruptly before the astonished company. "Hector!" articulated Mrs. Dunbury, reaching out her arms.

He was pale and stern of look. He heeded her not. He strode to the coffin; he gazed on the face of the dead. The invalid, feeble as she was, rose up, white and ghost-like, from her couch, and tottered to his side! "My son! Hector! speak to me! This is poor Edward, who was drowned. Charlotte —"

"Ay, where is she?" said Hector's hollow voice. He turned upon his father: his look was terrible. "At your hands I demand my wife!"

Mr. Dunbury stood speechless; the relations looking on with consternation. Still the invalid clung to Hector, whose soul knew her not. The clergyman, a mild and formal man, stepped forward.

"Have respect for the dead!"

"'Tis not my dead!" said Hector. "At your hands, sir," he repeated, standing before his father, "I demand my wife!"

"I do not know her!" broke forth Mr. Dunbury.

"You DID NOT know her!" answered Hector. "And it were better for your soul had your eyes never beheld her! The dove to whom you refused shelter, the lamb you drove out to the wolves — my wife, whom your cruelty killed — I require her life at your hands!"

"This — this is strange language to address to me, sir!" gasped the father.

"It is strange language! Would to God I had never lived to speak it, or you to hear it! O, were you not my father!"

"My son! my child!" uttered the invalid, "listen a moment, I beseech you! Charlotte — you have not heard all — you have not heard aright —"

"I have heard! My father — MY FATHER — thrust her forth! It is the village talk. With his curse she went! Her blood is upon his hands! My wife! my wife! my wife! O, God! control my soul!"

Covering his face, he rushed from the room, his mother crying

out to him, and clasping his neck. Still he knew her not, or heard not, or heeded not. But, at one thrilling word her tongue pronounced, he started, and gazed at her.

"Mother! did you say —"

"Lives!" she exclaimed, with exalted emotion.

"Lives! Charlotte! is it true?"—

"My son, it is heavenly true!"

"Where? speak at once!" As soon as she could gather breath, the invalid told the tale. "O, mother!" said Hector, with bursting joy, "the word is worth a hundred thousand worlds! She lives!"

He sprang from her arms; he leaped upon his horse, and rode northward with furious speed. When once more he drew rein and flung himself from the saddle, it was at the door of Mr. Rukely's house.

A beautiful snow-storm speckled the heavens, and whitened all the ground. At the window of her room sat Camille, gazing out upon the wondrous phenomenon of the northern winter. Slowly, steadily, and one by one, the white flakes came fluttering down; each falling and settling softly in its place, forming one vast white robe of ermine for the earth. And she was thinking how insignificant in itself seemed each feathery speck, yet how necessary all to complete nature's fair device, and fulfil her wise design. One went to ridge the rails of the olden fence; another was lost in the infinity of the fields; another joined the busy swarm that clustered on limb, and branch, and smallest quivering twig, of the apple-tree; another fell by the kitchen, and was trodden under foot. She called the snow HUMANITY, and looked up in the cloud to find a representation of herself. She chose, by chance, one minute speck from among the millions that darkened the air; watched its slow increase, as it approached the earth; saw it assume the spangled angles of a fair light flake, and sink gently, steadily — into the well! She was wondering what it meant; whether the well was death, or the bosom and source of all humanity, or the heart of one, when the door of the chamber was thrown suddenly open, and Bertha rushed in. Her speech

was incoherent ; but her looks, her confused, hurried words, were but too full of meaning.

“ I don’t know who it can be ! ” said Bertha. “ I heard the bell ring ; I listened — mother was at the door — a voice demanded you ! ”

“ Perhaps,” faltered Camille’s pale lips, “ perhaps it is a friend ! O, if it were — Hector ! ”

“ I will know ! ” exclaimed Bertha, agitated betwixt hope and fear. Camille listened, as Bertha disappeared ; heard eager voices approaching presently, and a man’s tread on the stairs. The door opened again. Bertha flew in. She was followed by — Robert Greenwich !

Marble cold with despair, Camille sank down upon the pillows of the arm-chair, fixing her icy looks upon the comer.

“ You are discovered ! ” uttered Bertha. “ He has come to warn you — to save you ! ”

“ He ! ” repeated Camille, with a shudder.

“ Even I ! ” said Robert, with looks intense and haggard. “ For God’s sake, waste not a moment or a word ! I thought you dead. In that thought I have suffered more than death ! — a thousand deaths ! Believe me, for your own sake ! I am in the confidence of the southern agents ; they are on your track ; I have but five minutes the start of them. In five minutes it will be too late ! ”

“ O, Camille ! ” said Bertha, “ why do you doubt ! Surely, he is your friend ! ”

“ If I have an enemy in the whole world,” said Camille, “ it is he ! He stands in my sight for all that is false and black in humanity ! ”

“ How ? — O, no — ” began Bertha.

“ I told you of Mr. Roberts,” interposed Camille, firm in her very despair. “ I told you not half ! Mr. Roberts and Robert Greenwich are the same. Tell me, is he to be trusted ? ”

Bertha was struck dumb with this announcement.

“ Do not make me worse than I am ! ” said Robert ; “ for, as I have wronged you, all I live for now is to make atonement. Your refusal will be to your own ruin, and to my eternal despair.

I have a swift horse at the door; I can take you to a place of safety. If you are found here, nothing can save you! No money, no influence, no law —”

“Tell us,” cried Bertha, “how she has been discovered.”

“By a bribe. Dickson fell in with Mr. Crumlett —”

“O, Matilda!” Bertha cried out, “it is what I feared!”

“Since you required proof,” said Robert, “I have betrayed the betrayer. How can you doubt?”

“I do not doubt,” answered Camille, faintly. “But I will stay, and meet my fate.”

“Think of Hector!” pleaded Bertha.

“O, Hector!” — Camille’s strength gave way; she wrung her hands. — “But what can I do?”

“Escape!” And Bertha began hurriedly to wrap her in tip-pets and shawls. “I know that you can trust him; I know that he is sincere. — O, if Mr. Rukely would come!”

“Do with me as you will! My mind is weak as my frame! But — do you go with me, Bertha!”

“Be sure I will stay by you.”

“O, sir!” and Camille turned her despairing eyes on Robert, “if it is in your heart to deceive me now, do but look upon me — consider what you do!”

He looked upon her, — so pale, so frail and helpless; and if there was treachery in his heart, and had that heart been anything but stone, it must have relented then. But neither by word nor look did he evince any but the sincerest emotions. There was a Bible on the stand; he seized it, and took oath thereupon to be henceforth truth itself, in all his dealings with her whom he had so wronged. He wished to carry Camille down stairs in his arms. But she would not suffer him. With the help of Bertha and Mrs. Wing, she reached the door. “And you, Bertha?”

“I had forgotten!” said Bertha.

“A moment’s delay may ruin all!” said Robert.

Bertha ran for her bonnet and cloak. Camille had suffered herself to be placed in the cutter, and wrapped in its robes. Robert leaped in. Bertha did not appear.

“We cannot wait!” The horse sprang. Camille uttered a

cry; she turned her feeble head, and looked back imploringly. there stood the wondering old lady; then Bertha ran hurriedly from the house. It was too late. The gate was passed; the cutter flew over the ground; and the white storm settled down between Camille and the only haven of safety she knew in the wide world.

A rash and hasty step; in avoiding an uncertain danger, to rush into the very face of a certain one! So thought Bertha, after Camille was gone. And Bertha, wild with excitement, accused herself as of some unpardonable crime. In her agitation she ran out to find Matilda, who had gone to do an errand in the village. She met Miss Fosdick hurrying home through the storm.

"What is it?" cried Matilda. "I'm sure as I ever was of anything in my life that Charlotte Woods was in the cutter that just passed!"

"She was!" uttered Bertha. "And you—you—Matilda—why did you tell that she was here?"

"I, tell!" echoed Matilda. "I never did! I hope to die! I never lisped it to a soul!"

"True, Matilda?—never to any one?"

"Never! sure as I live!"

"Not even to Enos?"

"Did n't I tell you I would n't?" But Matilda's voice faltered, and she looked troubled.

"O, then," said Bertha, "we have been deceived! Robert guessed where she was, and made up the story. Run for Mr. Rukely! He is at the conference. Make haste, Matilda!"

"Why," cried Miss Fosdick, "who said I told Enos Crumlett? I can't think that I ever breathed a syllable to him about it, and if I had, he would n't gone and told."

Bertha hurried back to the house, in greater trouble than before, believing that she had been duped by Robert's confident air and protestations of friendship; and that, through her, Camille had been betrayed. A sudden change was given to the current of her thoughts, however, when, arriving at the house, she found

the southern agents there before her ; the doors flung wide ; the old lady frightened ; and Dickson furious at discovering that once more the bird had flown.

Beyond the village, Robert pursued an unfrequented road, and, turning into a forest, followed a winding, irregular track, among the trees.

“ Where are you taking me ? ” implored Camille.

“ To the only spot I know where you can spend the night in safety,” answered Robert. In safety ! The word sounded hollow as mockery in her ear ; — as if there could be safety for her anywhere, with him !

He drove on. The woods stood strangely still in the storm ; there seemed no motion but the falling of the snowy cloud, no sound save that of hoofs and runners among the dark columns of the forest. The road was one that had been beaten by wood-cutters ; it was rough and uneven ; and Robert, who found it necessary to proceed slowly, occupied the time in endeavoring to reassure Camille. That he had suffered pangs of remorse on her account, she could not doubt ; but, knowing him to be a slave to selfishness and passion, not one spark of genuine faith or hope could she draw from his most earnest vows. As they penetrated further and further the gloom of the woods, deeper and darker became her despair. “ O, Hector ! Hector ! ” called her soul, in its helplessness ; “ come to me ! come to me ! ”

At length they turned into a path so narrow that the cutter touched the bushes on each side, as they passed. They were in the midst of a thicket that had overgrown an ancient clearing. “ Here,” said Robert, “ we are beyond pursuit.”

“ What is here ? ” uttered the shuddering fugitive.

“ A refuge — a home — a protector ! ” — and Robert pointed out a log-hut, which appeared suddenly to view, as they turned a point in the tangled wild. It was a dismal spot ; the hut had a dreary, ruined, uninhabited aspect ; the gloom, the storm, the savage loneliness of the wood, which Camille’s eye beheld on every side, added terrors to her situation. She had resolved in her heart not to leave the cutter, unless dragged from it by force ; when, to her astonishment, Robert, leaping upon the ground

knocked three times upon the door. After some delay, it was slowly opened, and a chubby female face appeared, accompanied by an uncovered head, and a short, plump figure, carelessly attired.

"Why! is it you? Who have you got with you?" The face struck Camille peculiarly; she had seen it somewhere; and, at the sound of the voice, a flood of recollections rushed over her. — "Dear me! Miss Woods!"

"I had forgotten that you were old friends," said Robert. "So much the better."

"Does my husband know?" — and the chubby face turned to Robert with a look of trepidation.

"There was no time to consult him," said Robert.

"I'm afraid he won't like it — I — it is so sudden!" — and, turning to Camille again, the chubby face tried to smile. "This is a surprise, is n't it? How do you do? How have you been? Are you pretty well? Has your health been good since — it is quite unexpected, finding me in such a place, is n't it? Who ever thought you would visit me? How well you are looking!"

"She is just up from a sick bed," said Robert. "Make way, and place a chair."

"Why, is she ill?" cried the excited little woman. "Who would have thought? How feeble you do look! Excuse appearances; we are — my husband has a fancy for rural spots, — we're here only temporarily, you know. How did you leave Canada?"

The interior of the hut was in keeping with the exterior; the walls were of plastered logs, the floor of rough plank, the furniture scanty and rude. But a blazing fire in the chimney cast a glow of comfort upon the scene; and the chubby little woman hastened to place an old-fashioned arm-chair before the hearth for Camille. Having seen his companion seated, Robert went out to take care of his horse. The door was shut and fastened. Then Camille held eagerly upon the arm of the duchess, who was removing her things.

"Dear Mrs. Sperkley!" said she, "I think you are my friend! Explain this to me! It seems so strange that I should be brought here, — that I should find you!"

"Bless me!" cried the duchess, "you know more about it than I do! I never was so astonished in my life! Is't an elopement? Excuse me. I mean, are you married?"

"You have not heard, then, that I have been pursued — hunted —"

"Heavens, no! How? when? where? Have you passed — any of — it?"

"Have you heard nothing? — how they came to take me — how I escaped?"

"Not a word! How was you found out? How much was there of it? Where did you pass it? O," exclaimed the duchess, turning all sorts of colors, and exhibiting signs of consternation in every look and gesture, "my husband said 't would be so! If ever we was found out, 't would be through him! Why did he bring you here? We shall all be taken together! He's the most rashest, inconsiderit man that ever I see! Are they following you now? Can they track you here?"

"I do not know; my mind seems all confused! Either I do not understand you, else you do not understand me."

"Did n't you know what kind it was when you passed it?"

"What are you saying?"

"Why!" cried the duchess, "was n't it for passing?"

"I do not know what you mean by passing. I am — I was — they call me — a fugitive — a slave! They have come to claim me, — to take me back!"

"You! Mercy! is that it? I thought — dear me, what have I been talking? Then you have n't had any of it? But what should he bring you here for?"

"He is coming; he will explain to you; I cannot," said poor Camille. "But, O, Mrs. Sperkley! you are a woman; you will be my friend!"

"Wait!" said the duchess. "There's his knock." She sprang to undo the fastenings of the door. At sight of Robert entering, Camille's vision grew dark, and a few minutes later, with but a dim consciousness of what had taken place, she found herself lying upon a bed, in a strange apartment, with Robert bending over her, while Mrs. Sperkley bathed her lips and temples.

"Drink," said Robert, holding a glass to her lips. "It will do you good."

"No, — leave me," entreated Camille.

"It is a simple restorative; you need it much," insisted Robert.

"Perhaps; but I will not drink."

"Go!" — Mrs. Sperkley pushed Robert away. — "I can manage her!" And the little woman presented the draught with one of her most confident and persuasive smiles. To her astonishment, it was still refused. "Why, 't an't bad! Jest taste it."

Camille glanced suspiciously at Robert's retreating figure. "I have heard," she whispered, "of people being drugged! O, Mrs. Sperkley, you will be true to me! and, if I should not be all the time in my right mind, you will not let me take any hurtful drink, — tell me that!"

"Who ever heard of such a thing?" ejaculated the duchess. "Look!" and she drank the potion at a breath. "It's wine, right from my husband's bottle. He always has the best o' wine. You shall see me pour some for you."

After that, Camille drank. The wine revived and warmed her. She wished then to be left alone, and Mrs. Sperkley withdrew. She was lying languidly upon the bed, with her eyes closed, thinking unutterable thoughts, and searching deeply within herself for the light of Wisdom to guide and sustain her, when the creaking of the door, and a footstep by the bed, startled her. She looked up, and saw Robert entering softly.

"I am sorry if I disturb you," he said, in a low tone. "If you can sleep, let me sit here and watch."

"I prefer to be alone," answered Camille, closing her eyes again, and covering her face. He dropped upon his knees by her side. He groaned; his frame shook; she heard the gnashing of his teeth. "Will you leave me, sir?" she said, more firmly than before.

"Yes, since you wish it." But he did not move. There was a long pause. "O, God!" he burst forth at length, "why are you so beautiful? why are you so lovely?"

"Robert Greenwich!" she cried, starting up, "will you go?"

"Camille," he answered, in tones stifled by passion, "I have sworn, and I will keep my word. But hear me one moment. Your only safety is in me. You shall rest here until to-morrow; but Canada must be reached; there is danger in delay. We will go together. The service, the love, the life of a great soul, is yours, if you will accept it. Have I not shown my devotion to-day? Do you not think differently of me? Am I not worthy at least to be your servant?"

"No!" said Camille. "Tempter! I will not hear you!"

"You still have hope of Hector. But he cannot save you. His attempt to purchase you has proved abortive. No wealth could satisfy your owner. If you are taken, you must return to slavery. This is hard language, but it is the truth. I wish you to know your danger, and to know me."

"My danger is in you — I know no other! O, it is you who have done me treacherous wrong; it is to you I owe so much suffering! Perhaps what you tell me is true; perhaps Hector could not save me, were he here; but, sir, rather than live your favorite, even your wife, I would die beneath the feet of swine! Why will you not understand me? Why will you not believe the testimony of my soul? It is my whole nature, my life, my very being, that rises up against you!"

Robert struggled with himself, striving, perhaps, to keep the oath which he had not indeed taken in idle mood. But resolution was weak. Passion was mighty. He saw Camille in his power. The gulf of temptation opened beneath him like a hell. He seized her hand.

"Touch me not!" she cried. "Serpent!"

And, feeble as she was, she sprang up, flying from his approach.

"Greenwich!" called the duchess, from without. Robert made no response; she then began to knock violently, and shake the door, which — as Camille discovered, to her dismay — had been bolted on the inner side.

"What do you want?" demanded Robert.

"Do come out!" whispered the duchess. "There's a sleigh in the bush. Some men are coming to the door, and I'm frightened to death!"

A shadow swept over Robert's face. "How many?"

"Three or four. They're knocking! What shall I do?"

Robert slipped back the bolt, glided from the chamber, and obtained a hasty glimpse at the party, through a loophole near the outer door of the hut. The knocking was repeated.

"Shall I open?" whispered the agitated duchess.

He put her off, and hastened back to Camille. "That accursed Dickson! They have tracked us by the snow. Shall I save you?"

"Save me! how?" said the pallid girl.

"Say but the word, and 't is done! There's not an instant to lose!"

"What do you mean?"

"Look at me! You have distrusted, scorned me, spat upon me! I'm not the fool to serve you for such pay. Choose now your fate!"

"How — choose?"

"Between me and slavery! Between me and perhaps a dozen brutal masters! Speak — at once!"

The knocking at the door had become loud and violent. Robert grasped Camille's arm, as she supported herself by the bed. Her suffering and terror were extreme; but, in the midst of all, she kept her bright unchanging look on his, and a resistless spiritual power seemed poured upon her, as she spoke.

"Come a thousand evils, come slavery, come death! — I can die, but I cannot sin!"

Dickson's party thundered at the door.

"Consider!" said Robert, with flaming eyes. "In their hands you will be lost. Vengeance and hatred are hungry for you! There is in this house a place of concealment, which I would defy an army of Dicksons to discover! Once there, you are safe. Promise me your love, and nothing shall harm you!"

"I cannot resist wrong with wrong; I cannot promise falsely!" answered Charlotte. "Save me for justice, for mercy, — I will thank you; but, if for your own selfishness, I shall scorn you the more!"

Blows shook the door of the hut, and voices called and threatened. Mrs. Sperkley ran to and fro, beside herself with terror.

"Is this your answer?" hissed Robert.

"It is my answer!" came the firm response.

Robert rushed to the door, and threw it broadly open. "Dickson," said he, "I'm glad to see you."

"Greenwich!" said Dickson, with a ferocious look, "I'm glad to see *you*! A mighty fine trick you've played us!"

"It's a trick for which you'll thank me!"

"With a vengeance!" growled Dickson. "Where's that gal?"

"In a safe place—for you. Crumlett has flunked; he warned her to escape. Mrs. Rukely called to me for help, as I was riding by. I brought her here,—to keep her until word could be got to you. If this is the way I am thanked,—there is your prey; clutch her, and good luck to you!" And, as the human hounds, cheered on by the stanch Oliver Dole, rushed into the chamber of the defenceless fugitive, the traitor Robert turned his back, and fled. He ran to a hovel in the thicket close by; there stood his horse, where he had left him; he brought him out, leaped into the sleigh, lashed him with his whip, and, dashing past the house, and along the narrow, winding path, reached the road, and returned the way he came.

The storm had ceased. Before him spread the woodland, calm and still. Over the whited ground, beneath the snow-laden boughs, amid the solemn trunks that stood amazed as he passed, he urged his horse's speed with whip and rein. The snow seemed a mantle dropped from heaven for his destruction. It had sailed down before him, to receive the fatal print of his hoofs and runners in the woods; but it had failed to cover his track, when he passed on. It was the flight of guilt, of fear, of baffled rage and shame: to quit the scenes of his unmanly acts, to fly his native land, to leave the past and remorse forever behind him! O, that whirlwinds would blow! that the trees would groan and roar! that howling storms would cover his track with drifts! He approached an opening of the wood. Beyond, above the shaggy mountain side, glowed the subdued fire of the afternoon sun through banks of gilded cloud, shooting mild rays athwart the forest tops,

and tinging with faint gold the bosom of the virgin snow. Overhead the myriad curving branches, the infinite net-work of silver-lined boughs, the roof of ebon tracery edged with pearl, opened, and brightened, and smiled in the blushing light. His career seemed all the more fearful and guilty from contrast with this beauty. Perhaps he felt the eye of Deity looking down upon him then, or the bright heaven his sin had forfeited smiling in pity upon his flight.

He lashed his horse, and was soon out of the wood. He had turned down the western track before he observed a horseman riding fast between him and the sun. He was approaching; they met; lightning glances of recognition passed between them; Robert whipped on more furiously than before; and the other, wheeling short on his course, spurred after him.

The race was brief; but already the competitors had passed the village, astonishing spectators by the unusual scene, when the pursuer, galloping to the head of Robert's horse, grasped the rein, and with a sudden wrench, bearing the poor animal sheer from the track, broke his perilous speed against the road-side fence. The shafts were splintered, the cutter overturned, the rider hurled headlong; and Hector, wheeling again, leaped down from his palpitating steed, just as Robert snow-covered, bruised, bewildered, was struggling to his feet

XLIII.

THE LAW TAKES ITS COURSE.

"ALL right!" chuckled Dickson, as his hand grasped Camille's shoulder. "Come, my chick! I reck'n you'll go along 'thout any more fuss; there's been fool'n' enough for one while."

"No violence!" interposed Oliver Dole. "Let the law quietly take its course; that's all we want."

Camille, who had fallen upon her knees by the bed, attempted to rise, turning her suffering, bewildered looks upon the man of law. Such gentleness and frailness, such loveliness and distress, he had little expected to behold. His stern face contracted with pain, as his public conscience was momentarily surprised by a ray of human feeling that stole into his heart. With a softened look, he extended his hand, to support her faltering step; when suddenly she fell like one dead at his feet.

"Jones!" cried Dickson, "pass yer flask! I'll fetch her out of this! I've seen sech tricks 'fore to-day."

"What you going to do with her?" screamed the affrighted duchess.

"Jest you stan' one side, and hold yer clatter, — that's all I ask of you!" And Dickson roughly administered the restorative to his victim, holding her head upon his knee.

"I'm astonished to find her so feeble!" exclaimed Oliver Dole. "She ought n't to be moved till she's stronger."

"If she could run away, she can go with us!" growled Dickson.

"Greenwich has give us the slip!" cried Jones. "There he goes, by Jehu!"

"After him, Jones! Take the little sleigh. Ketch him, if

ye die ! He don't git off so, after break'n' his part o' the barg'in !"

"Keep yer fist onto her !" cried Jones, at parting.

"Resk me, for that ! I don't quit my holt, till she's safe under lock and bar, make sure o' that ! Ah ! com'n' to, a bit, be ye ? That's right ; spunk up ! It's got to come ; and the sooner it's over, the quicker. Here, you apple-face," — to the duchess, — "han't she got no bunnit, nor noth'n' ?"

Mrs. Sperkley brought Camille's things, and, in great trepidation, assisted to put them on. Then the helpless form was lifted in the arms of the brutal man, and borne to the sleigh.

"Be careful with her," said Oliver Dole. "It's hard business enough, make the best on 't."

"Don't ye s'pose I know what's for my interest ? Of course I'll be car'ful ; I'll handle her like an egg. Make a place on the sleigh-bottom ; we can keep her warm 'twixt our feet."

"Good heavens, don't drop her head that way !"

"Lord, she'll live through it, only fix her so's 't she can breathe !" said Dickson. "Seems to me ye've growed mighty chick'n-hearted, since our 'quaint'n'ce begun. You was fierce enough for the business ! But, since these cussed north'n dough-faces set up sech a yell aginst us, you've looked a mighty sight like flunk'n'. There, she'll go so, comf'table enough, I reck'n. Now, driver, git out o' this bush fast as yer horses'll carry us !"

The horses were fleet ; the driver stanch, well-paid, and eager in the hunt ; and they soon reached the opening of the wood.

"Slack up, half a sec'nt !" cried Dickson. "I's in hopes we'd ketch Jones and Greenwich ; but let 'em go ! How d' ye git on, my gal ? Pooty comf'table ?"

Camille lay still and pale as death, in the position in which she had been placed. Her eyes were closed ; she did not speak ; she appeared scarce to breathe. Dickson's brows gathered.

"I don't like the looks o' that face ! I reck'ned she'd come to, 'fore this, and scream, and take on, like they gen'ly do. I don't fancy driv'n' through the village with her, nuther ; 't would be hard keep'n' her out o' sight ; and yer north'n ab'lish'n folks are sech cussed fools !"

"T' other road 'll be 'bout as near," remarked the driver.

"Then take it; and don't let next spring's grass grow under yer runners, nuther! S'pos'n' we git her up, so 's 't she can suck the air a little freer. I wish I 'd kep' Jones' flask! Why the devil did n't I? That would fix her."

Oliver's face was troubled. He bent anxiously over the helpless captive, endeavoring to raise her to an easier position. "How do you feel now? A little better, an't ye? You must pluck up courage; you're perfectly safe; you're in the hands of the law, and there 'll be no injustice; try to go through it bravely, — you will, won't ye?" But only a low moan escaped her, and her head sank powerlessly upon his arm.

"There, I like that better!" exclaimed Dickson. "'S long 's they can make that noise, there's hopes on 'em. O, she 'll git through 't, somehow. They all act so. Thar's a mighty sight o' sham 'bout these yer white ones. They're 'maz'n' shrewd; tough, too, some on 'em are."

"There 's no sham here!" said Oliver Dole.

"Wal, sham or no sham, she's got to go! Git her safe once, then I'll have a doctor look to her; but I an't go'n' to run no resks! Don't her bunnet choke her?"

Dickson's impatient fingers tore the strings. A slight shrinking and shuddering, as his rough hand touched her throat, was the only sign of consciousness she gave. All external things had grown dim and shadowy around her. To Dickson's brutal speech, to the officer's kinder words, to cruelty, humiliation, bodily pain, she was alike insensible. Not that feeling was dead, — but one deep, unspeakable agony absorbed all. She knew not when the steeples and chimneys of the town appeared in view; when the sight of the jail, with its barred windows and grim stone walls, gladdened Dickson's ferocious eyes; nor when the commissioner's house was reached.

A bald, hump-backed, pursy, Union-saving judge, threw open the door of welcome to the hunters of human flesh. Then once more she was lifted rudely; strong arms bore her from the sleigh; behind her, doors were closed; she was in a strange-looking apartment; — all this flitted like mist over the agoniz-

ing dark of her mind ; and she sat listless, dumb, with death upon her face and in her heart, while the sickening, horrid dream went on.

She was now half conscious of human shapes thronging the room ; of eyes fixed upon her, some in stony curiosity, some in feeble pity ; of low, fierce, rapid words spoken, which seemed somehow mixed with her fate ; of a stern-visaged man at a desk, questioning and writing ; of a pale-faced, solemn clock staring upon her, from the wall ; and of many things mingled, undefined, whirling and whirling in filmy indistinctness around her.

She had no sense of the time that elapsed. To Dickson, it was just twenty-seven minutes, by his hunting-watch. His brows blackened with impatience. He thrust the timepiece back into his pocket, and dashed the sweat from his forehead.

"An't we never go'n' to git through ? What yer wait'n' for now ?" The hump-backed judge sat at his desk, signing a jail order, with a grimace of official wisdom. Oliver Dole stood to receive the document. Dickson, furious, stamped the floor. Lawyers and spectators pressed around. In the midst, two men supported Camille upon her chair. Others, stationed at the doors and windows, kept back the clamorous crowd.

"Marshal Dole !" spoke the judge's iron voice. There was a hush of expectation, as, shaking the ink-sand from the paper, he folded it, with a calm stroke of his fingers, and passed it over the desk. Oliver thrust it in his breast-pocket, and with a trouble of face that might have impeached his public conscience, turned to his poor captive.

"Got it ?" cried Dickson. "Cl'ar the way ! Have yer men on hand, marshal ! If the mob wants fun, they shall have it !" And he adjusted a pistol beneath his coat.

"Don't offer provocation !" exclaimed Oliver, huskily. "March out peaceable, and in order. Let the girl take my arm, — 't will look better."

"Come !" muttered Dickson, shaking Camille's shoulder.

She started, and breathed quick, a momentary gleam of reason flashing from her vacant eyes.

"Is it — to-night ?" she uttered, like one half awake.

"Yes, it's to-night!" said Dickson, coarsely. "Come, ye're go'n' to walk a step or two, d'ye know it?"

"Am I — going?"

"Yes, my gal; you're goin'. Can't be helped, ye know; so cheer up, look bright, show yer pluck once!"

"Let me stay one night!" pleaded Camille, in a voice so utterly weak and helpless, that only those immediately surrounding her could hear.

"Have this veil over yer face!" said Dickson. "Ye don't want to be seen look'n' babyish, ye know. Now take the marshal's arm. I'll hold on t' other side, so 's 't ye shan't fall. Be accommodat'n', and 't'll go a mighty sight easier with ye than if ye're contrary, ye know." And, with a rude grasp, he attempted to lift her to her feet.

"Shall I never see him again?" she implored, in a faint, sobbing utterance. "Am I to be taken right away?"

"Hang it!" cried Dickson, "ye're only go'n' to jail, ye know. So don't be scart, my gal. You'll be kep' there to-night, — and it may be a day or two 'fore the judge gives his decish'n. So spunk up; it's got to come, ye know; 't an't no use cavin' in."

Thereupon, gathering some little hope, she knew not what, or wherefore, Camille made a feeble effort to arise.

"That's the talk!" said Dickson, clasping her with brute force. "I got ye; ye can't fall, if ye try. Keep up your side, marshal. Now, then, one foot right ahead o' t' other; no flinch'n'! Thar!" — as she made a step towards the door, — "what'd I tell ye? Now's our time, marshal!"

Camille stopped; her limbs grew rigid; her form bent back, writhing, as in a mortal spasm.

"None o' that!" muttered Dickson, shaking her. "Come, valk! Ye want me to carry ye, hey?"

She was waking. It was no more a dream. The awful meaning of it all burst upon her. Freedom, happiness, taken forever away! Hope, life, love, all, all gone! A fate more horrible than a thousand deaths awaiting her! and she alone, defenceless, helpless, delivered over to ruffians by the LAW itself! O, God! O, God! O, God!

With sharp agony, consciousness came. She roused, and, tearing aside the veil, stood frenzied, casting a heart-chilling gaze around. There was a pause, then a tumult at the door, which was broken in ; and a wild figure, with hair disordered, and eyes darting fury, rushed into the room. Camille's voice burst in a shriek. Oliver Dole reeled against the shattered window. Dickson was hurled back ; and a swift arm caught up the pallid girl as she was sinking to the floor.

"She is mine !" thrilled a proud voice through the room. And Hector, defiant, held the throbbing form upon his heart. A shudder of awe passed through the spectators ; officers and judge recoiled before him.

"She is *mine* !" said Dickson, recovering himself, and clutching Camille's arm ; "by order of this court, — by the laws of the country !"

Hector thrust him off. "She is mine," he cried, "by the decree of heaven, — by the one eternal Law !"

"That don't hold in our courts !" muttered Dickson. "I call upon the marshal to do his duty !"

"Amen !" Hector turned to the court, his scorn and fury quivering in every fibre of his frame, in every line and curve of his lion-like face. "I call upon all to do the duty of men ! There is no power to take from me my own !"

"You 'll see !" spluttered Dickson. "Here's the judge ! — here's the marshal's force ! — she's got to go !"

"Mr. Dunbury," spoke the judge, "you forget yourself. You are resisting the execution of the law."

"Ketch holt here !" roared Dickson.

Mr. Dole and his deputies pressed forward. Hector held them off less by the might of his arm than by the terrors of his eye.

"Hers is a human soul !" — he bore his living burden nobly up, and a solemn power rolled through his tones. "'T is bound to mine ! And what God has joined, man cannot, SHALL NOT, put asunder !"

"Curse his trash !" frothed Dickson. "What ye all about ? Why don't ye ketch holt ?" And, clutching Camille again, he thrust his pistol into Hector's face. "I 'll shoot ye, by —"

The oath was gulped back, and he tumbled upon the floor like a log. Hector held — HIS OWN ! He strode with strong strides towards the door. The officers faltered ; the crowd gave way before him ; the judge's feeble remonstrance died in his throat. Then turning, with wrath and defiance stamped upon his front, Hector beckoned to the minion of the law. " Give that to your master ! " and his hand reached forth a paper to Oliver Dole, who delivered it to the judge.

Dickson scrambled upon his feet, and made a furious lunge at persons in the crowd who had seized his weapon ; but it was flung from the window. Again there was a hush, as the judge glanced his eye over the paper's contents. Dickson stood like a baffled wild beast, that knew not which way to turn. The judge rapped upon his desk. There was no need. Attention was breathless.

" This paper stops all legal proceedings! THE GIRL IS FREE ! "

The strained silence broke. A commotion swelled, bursting into the very presence of the judge, from the crowd without. In the midst of all stood Hector, wonderful to look upon in his bright, manly strength, with Camille still throbbing upon his breast.

" She is free ! free ! " ran from mouth to mouth through the crowd.

" A fraud ! " tore forth Dickson's infuriate speech. He rushed to the desk. His eyes flamed upon the paper. He stood a moment, stupefied, then smote the signature with his fist, and broke out, huskily, " By God, it's Tanwood's ! "

Hector had turned again. Oliver Dole was but too glad to wash his hands of their shameful work. There was no opposition from him or his deputies. Hector strode over the threshold. The crowd would have borne him upon their shoulders. But there was a majesty in his look, that put them off. A sleigh was in waiting. He stepped in ; he wrapped his precious burden to his heart ; and she, who was so late a thing, a slave, a chattel, rode out of the jubilant throng a SOUL, a WOMAN, a WIFE LOVING AND BELOVED.

XLIV.

RETRIBUTION.

ALONE, within the compass of narrow walls, behind an iron-grated door, sat Robert Greenwich.

The faint gleam of the sunset that tinged the high, barred windows had long since faded. The twilight gloom deepened. What was Robert thinking, at that hour? What change had come over him since, haughty and erect, but ghastly pale, tearing his glossy moustache with his shaking hand, he marched through the iron doors, under the sheriff's charge?

Darker still grew the prison. What silence! What awful solitude! Suddenly there was a clanking of doors and jingling of keys. The jailer, entering with a lantern, approached the prisoner's cell.

The yellow light revealed an appalling picture. Robert was scarcely recognizable. His visage was distorted; he seemed to have grown old a dozen years.

"Mr. Greenwich," spoke the jailer. A fierce down-look, a dark, despairing scowl, but no motion or word of reply. "Is there any person you wish to send for?"

Robert looked up. His mouth was bloody, his hair torn, his eyes haggard. "Does my father know?" By that hollow voice one would not have guessed the speaker.

"He has been sent for. He should be here soon. Anything else?"

"No!" The keeper hung his lantern upon a pendent chain, in the common hall; then, walking away with his jingling keys, the heavy prison-doors closed after him, with a dismal jar.

Two prisoners, at large in the common hall, placed a light

wooden table beneath the swinging lamp, and, producing a well worn pack of cards, commenced a cheerful game of all-fours. No other society in the jail; no sounds but their quiet conversation. Robert shrunk back within the shadow of his cell, burying his face in his hands, that he might neither see nor hear.

In a little while supper was brought him. The men ate at their table, with appetite, putting aside their cards. Robert seized his pitcher and drank plentifully, but left the food untasted; then sat still, as before, save that now and then his choked breath came hissing through his teeth, and the ague of despair shook the stool on which he sat.

Once more the iron doors opened, and a visitor, entering, was locked in the jail. He was a spare man, with a wrinkled face, and a stern, dictatorial expression. Walking with a quick step towards the cell to which the keeper pointed him, he gazed at the wretched object seated within. "SON ROBERT!" he enunciated, in amazed and indignant accents.

"Ha! you have come!" cried Robert, starting up.

He sprang to the grated door with infuriate looks, and quivering hands half closed, as if, in the madness of his rage, he would have torn the other limb from limb. The apparition was so sudden that 'Squire Greenwich recoiled with the instinct of fear. Robert pressed against the iron bars, glaring out upon him savagely.

"Son Robert, what is the meaning of this?"

"It means death!" said Robert's husky voice.

Drops of sweat started upon the 'squire's astonished face.

"Son Robert, are you insane?"

The prisoner wiped the foam from his lips unconsciously, and after a pause, struggling with himself, appeared more calm.

"Does it seem so strange to you, to find me here?"

"Strange, son Robert? Strange?" and, for the first time in his life, the prisoner heard a tremor of emotion in his father's voice. "You assuredly are not guilty —"

"I'm guilty of all! And I might have been guilty of more, could this hand have reached you!" Robert wiped his bleeding lips again, and thrust his forehead, with its tangled hair, against

the bars. "My life is blasted. I have no future. My career ends here. And I have you to thank! Do you understand? You, sir, you!"

"Son Robert," articulated the 'squire, "I do not understand; I am overwhelmed! I could not believe my ears when that I heard of your arrest. I cannot now believe my senses when that I see and hear you! Is it my son Robert whom I see caged like an enraged beast?"

"Old man!" said Robert, "hear me! It is for the last time, so heed me! Since the earliest years I can remember, I have had a burning hatred in my heart for you! When I was a child, not a day passed but I said, 'Some time he shall hear of this!' That time has come. The hell that has been all my life kindling is bursting forth."

"Son Robert! beware! Pause before you speak. Remember whom you address! Respect the paternal head!"

"Remember!—would I could forget! Respect!—how have I learned to hate! I cannot recall a single kind or loving word that ever you spoke to me. You were the tyrant—always! You ruled with a rod of iron. My most trivial faults were punished with cruelty. If there was any goodness in me, you crushed it out; while every evil trait I inherited—from you—was kept alive *by you*—provoked and strengthened by your despotism! Revenge became a part of me. Because I dared not vent it against you, I poured it upon others. That passion fired the rest. Now you behold me here! And I tell you I have you to thank! Take that, my parting gift, and hug it to your breast when I am gone!"

"Me to thank! Truly, truly,"—the 'squire's agitated hands struggled convulsively with his stifling cravat, and his broken voice was pitiful to hear,— "truly, son Robert, you are beside yourself! Who reared you up, from infancy, with unswerving care? Who disciplined your youth in all wholesome exercises of the mind? Who kept you at the Sabbath-school and at church? Who put into your hands healthful moral treatises, and gave you tasks from the Scriptures to commit to memory? Who taught you filial reverence, and respect for gray hairs?"

O, wretched young man! where are the talents intrusted to your keeping? Where are the seeds a pious parent planted?"

"The talents have brought me here; this is the harvest of the seeds! You did all that you boast of, and so I say I thank you; for, by the very means you used, you made me hate you and your lessons. I loathed the Sabbath-school, because driven to it with a rod. I never came near a Bible but I struck or kicked it, because of those hated tasks. I am calm now; I utter my solemn convictions, and you know I tell truths!"

"Indeed," groaned the 'squire, "indeed, I do *not* know! My pride was in you, my son, O, my son! I longed for the time when that we should behold you an ornament and an honor to the respectable name of Greenwich. I labored faithfully to that end. And is this the result?"

Sobs broke the old man's utterance. Still he struggled, as from long habit, to maintain his dignified speech and deportment; and it was touching to see the flood of his emotions bursting through the wreck of his poor, shattered pride. Robert looked on luridly.

"There may be points" — the 'squire confessed, wiping his wrinkled brow — "wherein I have fallen somewhat short of the highest wisdom. But, had I erred in all, I find no excuse for you. Still, you are my son. You bear the respectable name of Greenwich. And, whatever your faults, how glaring soever your ingratitude to my venerable hairs, I can yet find it in my heart to render you service."

"You can render none. I will accept none. My hands have plunged into crime, and I choose to meet the penalties."

"Crime! crime! a son of 'Squire Greenwich? crime!"

"That is the word! Would you be gratified to know the history?"

"I would know, though my heart be cleft in twain! But, I beseech you, speak not in such bitterness and wrath."

"Fair words, then, they shall be; I'll be tender with your nerves, old man! And the story shall be short, though it goes back to times long before I left home. My vices ripened early. But I had learned hypocrisy in so perfect a family school, that

you knew little of the wild nights I wasted ; escaping from the house by stealth, and seizing what pleasure I could, in recompense for your tyranny by day. When I came of age, you gave me the liberty you could no longer restrain ; I went south, and there, in the hot-bed of vice, my nature flourished. I ended by running away with a slave-girl, leaving more debts and sins behind than I will stop to count. To provide myself with means, I forged a note, and followed her to Canada, where I fell in with a villanous speculator. He knew an ingenious rogue, who had invented a spurious coin ; and, as they proposed to set up, on a small scale, an opposition to the legitimate mint, I was invited to join them. I asked nothing better ; and we fitted up an old house in the woods, and established an apparatus. I have distributed a good deal of the proceeds. In short, I was brought here for counterfeiting. I might have escaped, but by ill-luck I fell in first with that accursed Hector, then with the sheriff. On my way here, I learned of my friend Sperkley's arrest, in Burlington. His faithful housekeeper, who passes for his wife, will expect him home in vain. Then there are the slave-catchers ; they will concentrate all their rage on me. I set them on Camille's track ; and no questions were to be asked ; but I had not the virtue to be faithful even to them. So, you see, the son of respectable 'Squire Greenwich' — what fierce sarcasm in those words ! — " is provided for. I staked everything — I have lost — and this is the end ! "

" God of mercies ! " groaned the 'squire, " what do I hear ! Son Robert, my only son, the hope of my old age ! — you a double criminal — arrested — to be brought before a public court — tried, condemned, sentenced — O, God ! can all this be in store ? "

" Not quite ! " said Robert, with dark significance. " 'T will be a shorter agony. Good-by ; remember what I have said. I have thrown that burden off. Now go — I would be alone. "

" But, my son, " sobbed the broken-hearted old man, " while that I return to my dishonored and desolate home, let me at least carry with me the consolation of knowing that you are contrite and repentant — "

"Carry with you my hatred and my curse!" said Robert; "it's all I have for you, and a good-night to you! May your sleep be always peaceful as it will be this night!"

The keeper reappeared; and now the prisoner shrank back into his cell. The heart-crushed parent, shaking with the palsy of his grief, struggled long within himself before he found voice again to speak.

"Son Robert," — the keeper was looking on, and it was sad to see the flickering ghost of the poor old man's dignity rise up once more, — "I shall see you in the morning."

"Let me advise you to come early!" muttered Robert.

The keeper advanced. "I shall do all in my power to make your son comfortable, 'Squire Greenwich; and if he has any commands —"

"What are these men in for?" asked Robert, designating the card-players.

"The one in shirt-sleeves, for stealing a horse; the other, for killing one of his children in a drunken fit."

"Is the thing of which I am accused so much worse than theft or murder, that, while they have the liberty of the jail, it is necessary to keep me caged?"

"O, by no means! But, when you were brought in, it was thought advisable, for a while —"

"You see I am calm now."

The keeper selected a particular key from the bunch, and cheerfully unlocked the door of the cell. The 'squire, meanwhile, had tottered to the entrance. The two went out together. Then Robert threw himself upon his bunk, and lay there, tossing about, and tearing his flesh and hair by fits, until the suspended lamp burned out, and the card-players groped their way in the dark to their separate cells.

O, night! O, agony! O, remorse! — darkness, and woe, and the worm that gnaweth the heart! — how mysterious, how terrible, are ye all! Swords of flame flash all around the eden of the soul, and the sinner, seeking to rush in with impure feet, is lightning-stricken with their fiery tongues. Only through righteousness, in the white robe and celestial armor of Christ, can you enter the

blessed precincts of love and peace : and night, and agony, and remorse, — darkness, and woe, and the worm that gnaweth the heart, — God sends to teach the LAW.

All night Robert lay in his torment. But at the earliest glimmer of dawn he arose, and sat upon his bed. There was now a sort of calmness in his face, a fearful repose. And so he sat, while the slow, cold dawn advanced, twirling and twirling his silken cravat in his hands. At length he got up, and opened the door of his cell.

Darkness still hovered in the jail. But from the high windows a faint grayish light radiated upon the walls, and streamed along the floor. Robert stepped noiselessly across the hall. He reached the table where the card-players had sat the night before, stepped upon it with his knotted cravat in his hand, listened for a moment to the heavy breathing in the cells, then carefully removed the lantern from the chain.

What stillness ! what solemnity ! what gloom ! Suddenly there was a crash. The table had fallen ; the lantern rattled upon the floor. The horse-stealer started from his sleep. He rose up ; he gazed listening, affrighted, in his cell. But did he hear the struggles, the conflict of life and death, or see the dim, ghastly figure swinging by the chain ?

XLV.

CLOSING SCENES.

STRANGE is this boon of existence! How sacred! how fatal! how sweet! O, sorrow! O, love! O, despair! why have ye conspired?

Beautiful is this dear, warm flesh! The miracle of the heart-beat, of the rushing blood, how wonderful! Sensation, how delicious! Thought, affection, aspiration, the delirium of joy,—thank God for all. Yet beware, O, man! O, woman! penalty and peril hem us in; and we know not how terrible a thing it is to profane the sanctity of the soul.

Sin, tumult, endless toil, a little laughter, many tears, agony, longing, and the baffling search: such is man's history. O, Father! pity thy children!

Life is a fiery furnace, and none see God save those who have passed through the burning. Purification is born of the fire; the faithful shall not perish; brightness, triumph, heaven, await us; and to some there comes great peace. If there is anything for which one should thank God, it is peace. In that still lake sleep all life's turbulent streams. Its bosom is the mirror of God; lo, heaven lies deep within! all around, a light, ineffably soft and glorious, radiates and swims; and a hush, as of Sabbath stillness, of joy, of thanks, and of worship, fills all the summer air.

Such a hush pervaded Mr. Jackwood's house. There were words—but how gently spoken! there was laughter—but how subdued and mellow! there were tears—but how bright and happy!

"This 'ere 's a day wuth livin' to see!" observed the farmer. He sat upon a keg in the corner, whittling an ox-bow; but, somehow, he could not work; his eyes now and then grew misty, and

he would pause, holding his hands abstractedly, his countenance beaming with the light of a deep, earnest joy. "Don't seem to me it's right to work; it's kind o' like Sunday."

"Don't let's!" said Bim, who had been set to scour the table-knives, but who took a great deal more interest in his mother's baking. "I got two on 'em bright, — this one's for Charlotte, any how! Let the rest go, — I would!"

"Come, come!" his mother spoke up, cheeringly, "work away, or you won't have enough to set the table with. The pies'll take care o' themselves."

"Make 'em good, any way!" exclaimed Bim. "Charlotte likes lots o' sugar in 'em."

"Bim speaks two words for himself," chimed Phoebe's musical voice. "Here's a little crust left, — what shall I do with it?"

"Bake Rove a turnover," cried Bim, "and I'll eat it for him!"

"Shall I, mother?"

"Law, yes; do gratify the boy! But you must do them knives!"

"An't I?" said Bim. He was holding the dog's lips apart with his fingers, for the purpose of inserting brick-dust, from the scouring-board. "Rove's teeth are gittin' rusty, and I want 'em to look white for comp'ny."

The baking progressed finely. The big oven had been heated for the occasion. Extraordinary cakes, extravagant pies, emulous, puffy biscuits, — not to speak of Rover's aristocratic turnover, — rested snugly in the corners, and bubbled, smoked, and swelled, in the genial heat. They seemed to know, as well as anybody, that they were no common cooking; and to feel a pride in coming out with plump, handsome, brown faces, with dimples, where Phoebe's fork had pricked, fit to appear before the choice company in which they were to have the honor of being eaten.

"O, dear!" exclaimed Phoebe, "I don't know what to do! I want to laugh and cry! I wish it was dinner-time; then I could have an excuse to go to their room, and call them."

"An't there somebody to the front door?" said Mr. Jackwood. "Go and see, Bim'leeh."

Bim went skipping along the floor, followed by Rover, barking. Mr. Rukely entered. There were warm greetings between him and the farmer, — questions, and earnest congratulations.

"Why, father!" said Mrs. Jackwood, with the kindest of smiles, and with mist in her eyes the while, "you hardly know what you 're about, I do declare!"

In his excitement, he had offered Mr. Rukely the keg to sit down upon. Mr. Rukely remained standing.

"Set the big chair, Phoebe!" said the farmer.

Mr. Rukely could not stop. He had called to see Hector.

"I do'no' nobody they 'll be gladder to see!" cried Mr. Jackwood. "The way they spoke o' you 'n' your wife, — what you 'd done for 'em, — wal, 't an't of'n anything comes over me as that did! Go to the spare room, Phoebe, — don't be noisy, but step light, an' jest rap kind o' gentle on the door."

Phoebe could have asked no happier commission. To be near Camille, to hear the tones of Hector's voice, to look upon their faces for a moment, was delight enough for her.

"Yes, sir!" cried Mr. Jackwood, "'t was great! You should ben there to see! You never 'd git over it, the longest day o' your life, Mr. Rukely! I hope I an't proud; but I can't help thinkin' 't was my sleigh 't they got right into, an' 't I drove 'em away! I hope I an't revengeful, nuther; but I did feel a grudge agin them kid nabbers, an' I — Wal, 't was good enough for 'em! I can't help sayin' so much, any way."

"They was goin' to have our farm!" observed Bim, disdainfully.

"I guess they 'll let us alone," said his father, genially. "They sneaked out o' town las' night, like a couple o' sheep-stealers. It 'pears they tallygrafted that Cha'lotte was drowned; an' that's what made her owner — as he called himself — so ready to sell out. A smart young lawyer done the business for Hector, an' got the man to sign off for little or nothin', I guess; though I could n't find out jest how much. That's a terrible hard story they tell 'bout Enos Crumlett."

"I 'm afraid it's true," replied the minister. "Matilda is quite wild about it."

"He 'd better go to Californy, fust thing!" exclaimed Mr Jackwood. "He never 'll be nothin' 'round here; everybody 'l despise him. As for that Robert Greenwich —"

"You have not heard —" said Mr. Rukely, a shadow passing over his face.

"I heerd he was took up for counterfeitin', — an' I wan't much surprised, nuther."

Mr. Rukely reported, in addition, a startling piece of intelligence that had spread through the town that morning. Astonishment and solemnity fell upon the listeners.

"His poor father 'n' mother!" uttered Mrs. Jackwood. "Don't mention it to Phœbe, — she 's too happy to-day."

"What is suicide?" cried Bim.

"Hush! — 't an't nothin' you need to know 'bout!" said his father

Phœbe reappeared, radiant. "He 's coming right out, — and I 'm going back to stay with Charlotte!"

A minute later, the door again opened. A thrill ran through Mr. Rukely's ordinarily sluggish veins. The countenance that shone upon him was in itself a life-history, a revelation. How changed since he last saw it! Older, yet younger, and brighter; sadder, yet immeasurably more happy; serene, majestic, yet never so soft and tender; deeply thoughtful, deeply humble, yet smiling with the sweet, subdued effulgence of love and peace. Such was Hector on that memorable morning. He grasped Mr. Rukely's hand, and they conversed a few moments in presence of the family; then Hector led the way to Camille's chamber.

The young wife was reclining by a cheerful wood fire, on the pillows of an easy-chair. With eyes swimming in blissful light, she looked up; a smile of wondrous beauty and sweetness welcomed her friend, and the hand she gave him seemed all alive with the tremulous emotions of her heart.

Was Mr. Rukely surprised to see her blooming with promise of fair health? Ah, then, he did not know what magic lies in the sunshine of Love's face, — what subtle streams of life pour down into the very springs of our being from the sympathy and magnetic touch of those we hold most dear.

Mr. Rukely had been sent for, that morning, by Mrs. Dunbury. He had found her greatly changed. The excitement that had sustained her through a long and terrible trial, subsiding, had left her extremely low. Charlotte was saved, Hector was happy; she felt that she had nothing more to live for, and peaceful, not reluctant, she calmly awaited the end. After what had passed, knowing Hector's spirit, knowing Charlotte's wrongs and sufferings, she could not hope that they would return to the house from which a father's wrath had exiled them. But she had sent Mr. Rukely to them, with her love and blessing.

Also, before setting out, the young minister had conversed with Mr. Dunbury. He spoke of that interview; but, at mention of his father, Hector shook his head, with a look of infinite sadness.

"I know no father!" he said.

"I have obtained his consent," Mr. Rukely went on, "for you to return home."

"Home?" came the low echo from Hector's heart, and a heaving emotion struggled in his face, as he looked upon Camille; — "where the spirit is at rest, is home; hearts' love is home; I AM AT HOME!"

"What reply shall I make to Mr. Dunbury?"

"Take to him these words!"

"And your mother?"

"O, my mother! Tell her my soul loves her; and souls that love, though divided on earth, reunite in heaven!"

Camille wept. She joined in Hector's message to the invalid; and, shortly after, Mr. Rukely took his leave.

It had been a comfort to learn that Mrs. Longman — Camille's dear Canadian friend, who had come to Edward's funeral — would remain with her relatives. No kinder hand, no warmer heart, than hers, could have been sent to administer to the failing invalid. Still Hector felt it as a deep wrong, Camille as a sad privation, that they, who owed her so much love and gratitude, they, who were dearer to her than all the world, should be so near, and yet attend not at the pillow of the dying woman.

Three days passed, — days of hitherto inconceivable happiness, marred by but one shade of sorrow. They still remained the

welcome occupants of the spare room in Mr. Jackwood's house. As Camille's strength increased, Hector was beginning to think of some quiet little home in the village, — but something said, — "Wait!" On the afternoon of the fourth day, Corny was announced.

"I got a letter for ye, somewheres," said that young gentleman, making thorough investigations in his pockets. "Hello! — what's this? I'd like to know!" A worn and soiled envelope was brought to light. "I did n't know I had that! O, I remember! — it's what they gi' me in the village, one day, for Mis' Dun'b'ry, — an' I don't b'leve I ever thought on 't till this minute!"

Hector tore the envelope, took out a slip of paper, and unfolded it, — 't was his own telegraphic despatch from Mobile! He bit his lips, but, without a word, passed it to Camille. Meanwhile, Corny had produced another letter.

"That looks more like! The ol' man tol' me to bring it over. He's ben ra'al dumpy, lately; an' it's about the fust time he's spoke for five or six days. He don't growl to me no more, as he used to; I guess it's 'cause he's had some talks with Mis' Dun'b'ry; for when he comes out o' her room, his eyes look kinder red an' watery, 's if he'd like to cry, if he wan't a man. They don't spec' she'll live."

"Camille!" said Hector, with solemn and anxious looks, "the hour has come! We must go to our mother!"

No time was to be lost. A few minutes sufficed for all preparation. Corny had come for them in the cutter; it was waiting at the door. The family made haste to warm blankets, and a foot-stove was filled, to place at Camille's feet. Their thoughtful kindness was too much for the young wife. She pressed Mr. Jackwood's hand to her lips, blessing him and his, from the bursting fulness of her heart.

"If anybody should be thankful, it's me!" declared the farmer, brushing the tears from his honest cheeks. "Your comin' into my house, fust and last, has ben a blessin' to me an' to all; I can't be thankful enough for 't!"

Hector wrung the farmer's hand. Words seemed too feeble to express what swelled and burned within his breast.

"Could you know how great my happiness in my wife, then you might know something of my gratitude to you, her preserver!"

He placed Camille in the sleigh. Mrs. Jackwood wrapped the blankets around her, the farmer adjusted the foot-stove to her feet Phoebe arranged her veil, Bim stood holding the horse. A moment after, they were gone; and loving faces, tearful eyes, watched them as they rode out of sight.

It was the close of a very fair, calm winter's day. The forests on the mountain tops burned faintly in the sunset glow; and the sky all above was arched with ribs and bars of fire. But the last tinge was fading from the clouds, and the forests grew drear and dark, as Hector and Camille approached Mr. Dunbury's house.

Mrs. Longman received them at the porch. As she held Camille in her arms, Hector, advancing into the hall, saw the kitchen door open beyond, and his father pacing to and fro, with trouble written in deep lines upon his face. The young man turned aside, pausing a moment at the door of his mother's room, then gently lifted the latch.

The subdued light of departing day stole into the chamber. A calm and holy atmosphere breathed around. He entered softly, and moved with silent steps to the bedside; then, stooping tenderly and reverently, imprinted a kiss upon his mother's brow.

She looked up. "My dear boy!" Tears rained from Hector's eyes. He could not speak. "And Charlotte—" murmured the invalid.

"She is here!" He reached forth his hand. Camille advanced. He led her to the bedside; she bent down amid the hush; her kisses and tears fell warm upon the dying woman's hand.

"My child!"—and feebly the invalid raised both her arms to place about her form,— "are you happy?"

"O, blest!" sobbed Charlotte, upon her bosom.

Another pause; the love and peace of the invalid's countenance brightening and deepening. "And Hector?"

"Twice blest!" breathed Hector. "But, to see my mother

here, so feeble, and suffering so — ” His voice was choked. Camille rose up gently ; they bowed together by the bed.

“ My children,” said the invalid, as she looked upon them, “ this is all I have asked ! I do not suffer now. My soul is full of peace. I waited but for this hour, to fall sweetly into the arms of Heaven, and be forever at rest. Raise my head a little.”

With a tender touch, Hector lifted her to an easier position, adjusting the pillows beneath her head. “ Always so kind, my boy ! Give me a little water.” Camille held the glass to her lips, while she drank. “ The same gentleness and love, dear one ! Yes, Hector, I have waited but for this. Your father knows I have not long to stay. And, as he has seen me, for these few days past, sinking so rapidly, I have felt all the young love of his early years come back again, and his heart has been strangely softened ! He loves you, Hector ! He feels that he has been unjust to you, — more than unjust to this dear one ! ” A choking sensation broke her utterance ; but she added, presently, “ Will you not forgive him ? ”

“ O, MOTHER ! ”

There was a footfall upon the floor. One entered, walking with careful steps ; crushed in spirit, his form bowed as by a burden, his chin sunken sorrowfully upon his breast. The little group opened. He drew near the bedside, reaching out his trembling hands. A painful silence, then a quivering voice — “ Hector ! ”

The deep contrition of the look and tone ran like melting fire into Hector’s soul.

“ FATHER ! ” That one word expressed all. Their hands clasped. Forgiveness flowed from heart to heart. Then the father, taking courage, turned, with anguish in his looks, and extended a shaking hand to Camille.

“ My daughter ! ”

His long remorse, his crushed and penitent pride, and the new-born love of his soul gushing up through all, found utterance in those half-stifled words. Filled with a wild grief, and yet wilder joy inter-mixed, Camille faltered, bowed her weeping face, and

sank down at his feet. On the instant, as by quick sympathy, Hector was kneeling by her side ; one arm about her form, and one hand clasped in hers. The father extended his quivering palms above them, while heavy drops struggled down his unaccustomed cheeks.

“God bless you, — God bless you — my — children !”

“Peace !” whispered the dying woman, a smile of heavenly sweetness lighting all her face.

Peace ! And with that sacred word, the writer's task should end. Have we, then, gone through all these scenes of mirth, and passion, and woe, to reach a tearful close ? Blame not the writer. It was scarce his choice. The characters whose fortunes he has depicted have not been altogether fictitious ; they have been real existences to him, at least ; he has laughed with them, wept with them, and he would not part from them without tears. The narrative has been like a stream, holding its own free course ; and who could have known, when first we embarked in its limpid ripples and careless flow, how the waters were to accumulate, and darken, and sweep us on ? There have been bubbles plenty, eddies and shallow falls, torrents and floods ; and now let all sink in that still lake — described a little while ago — named Peace.

“But what became of Bim ? Was everybody happy at last ? You have not told us ! And did Phoebe get married ?”

Be patient, reader, and your questions shall be answered. Phoebe got married, of course. And she married a farmer, after all. If ever you go to Huntersford, inquire for Mrs. Higgins, — Phoebe married a Higgins, — and you shall find her as bright and happy a young wife as you will see the next twelvemonth. Bim often visits her, and brings Rover, — now a sedate and elderly dog, — to amuse the baby. The baby's name is Camille. There was a certain old lady who designed to have the child named Betsy Rigglesly ; and who, on paying a visit to the young mother, and learning that her wishes had been disregarded, was so much offended, that, after a brief stay of six weeks (during which time she had a great deal to do with a dismal old cotton handkerchief, on which could be faintly traced a washed-out print,

commemorating the praiseworthy conduct of a celebrated Samaritan), she cut short her visit, and went back to Sawney Hook, resolved never again to quit that delightful region. Phœbe bears her absence with cheerful resignation, and still persists in calling the child Camille.

Bim is growing up tall and manly, and his parents are as genial and happy an old couple as ever enjoyed the blessings of an approving conscience, and the fruits of a life of industry, in their latter days. Bim is beginning to go and see the girls; and he wishes Etty Greenwich was n't quite so romantic in her notions. Etty says she shall never be married. She devotes herself to poetry, and to the care of her white-haired father, who has grown quite infirm of late years. Bim does not call at the house so often as he would like to; for the sight of the old man's quivering lips and broken smiles of affection, when Etty smooths his cravat or combs his hair, always makes the young gentleman cry, and that he thinks is unmanly.

Of the Rukelys there is not much to be said. Their outward life is very even, almost monotonous; but inward trial has left its traces in Bertha's pale face. Matilda Fosdick lived in the family a year; when, taking pity on poor Enos, whom she had dismissed from the list of her suitors, on account of a certain transaction which had earned him the name of Judas Crumlett, she finally consented to fill the place his venerable parent was expected soon to leave vacant, and removed with him to the West, after the remains of that lamented lady had been consigned to the tomb.

In conclusion, shall we draw a picture of Hector and Camille entering upon their new life of labor and love, with the world's prejudice and frowns all unknown to their serene eyes? Of the broken father, bowed by his burden of sadness, yet redeemed by the memory of his sainted wife, and ripening into quiet and tender old age in the light of their affection? Of their first-born, wondrous boy, offspring of love and beauty, thrilling their fond hearts with his sweet prattle and melodious laughter? O, wedlock! O, holy love! let fall the veil, and hide the painful glory of thy face, in mercy to the longing souls and moaning hearts that have sought thy home and rest, and found it not!









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